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Masculinities, Competition and Friendship in an English Professional Football Academy

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Masculinities, Competition and Friendship in an English Professional Football Academy

Adrian Mathew Adams

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Bath
Department of Social and Policy Sciences

October 2015

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to utilise a unique researcher vantage point (as embedded academy coach) to explore the experiences of male youth footballers (14-15 years old) at an English professional football academy. Participant observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with twelve boys were used to generate data. The analysis focused upon (a) the competitive social organisation of the academy, (b) representations of masculinity (c) emotional proximity and what it means to be 'friends' in the academy setting, and (d) attitudes towards homosexuality. My findings highlight the limited ability of boys to develop trust and 'deep' friendships in this institutional context. These findings suggest that a hyper-competitive (neoliberal) market-driven rationality penetrates football academies and may play a role in altering the parameters of how 'friendships' can be lived and experienced for young people 'on the inside' of such institutions. Despite limitations on 'friendships' and emotional-proximity inside the academy, there was some evidence of *inclusivity* (c.f. Anderson, 2009), with regards to attitudes towards homosexuality. However, drawing on the concepts of *complicity* (Connell, 1987, 1995) and *hybridity* (c.f. Demetriou, 2001; Bridges, 2014), caution is maintained in describing these youth academy footballers as conclusively inclusive. Implications of these findings, limitations of this study and directions for future research are all discussed.

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PREFACE: TRAINING TIME: FLOODLIT NIGHTS AT WEST-SIDE

As I drive into West-Side¹ and through a winding complex of houses, commercial and industrial sites, I notice flickering in the gaps between the buildings. As I continue, I see the bright artificial light of the floodlit '3G' artificial-grass training pitch, the light spills down onto a central field from massive pylons positioned around the green field. I park my car in the first space I see; it's busy on training nights. I check my text messages because my phone beeped a couple of times on the way: some messages from parents saying they are stuck in traffic and might be a few minutes late. I step out of the car in my 'coaching gear;' shorts, t-shirt, and rain-jacket emblazoned with the club badge, long socks pulled up and the tops rolled down to just below my knees, football boots in one hand hanging down at my side, and a tactics board² in the other. A session plan of what I'm coaching the boys that evening is scribbled down onto a piece of paper, folded a number of times to the size of a matchbox and tucked into the top of my right sock, where I also keep a pen. This is my work uniform. I walk into the reception area, exchange a few hello's with parents of boys of all age groups, although I don't recognise all of them. I make my way through to a desk to 'sign in,' say hi to a few of the boys who are beginning to congregate to the side of the desk wearing their West-Side training kit and holding boots and water bottles under their arms and in their hands. I acknowledge them with a smile; "Alright lads, how's it going?"³ "Alright *Aid*," they reply. A new pair of boots or training shoes ("new wheels"), a haircut ("trim up," "lid" or "barnet"), or some other 'thing' that has happened recently provides a brief topic of conversation or 'friendly banter.' Away from the boys, the coaches are at it, too, bantering between themselves. I get my fair share of 'stick'.

"When you gonna get rid of those rascals and get some new wheels?"

"Bit of a trim up, mate?"

"What's up with your barnet today?"

¹ West-Side football academy is the pseudonym for the research site.

² A mini whiteboard used as a teaching aid.

³ All quotations in this preface are direct quotes recorded as field notes. This section of the preface is an amalgamation of multiple field notes from different moments in the field, to provide a narrative representation of interactions I would experience on a typical training night at West-Side football academy.

"You need to sort that lid out, son."

"You lost weight?"

"Need to get on the weights, mate."

"Look like you've been eating well lately."

"Are those shorts spray-painted on?"

"He's packed on some weight hasn't he?"

"When you gonna start paying taxes?"

"Got a real job yet?"

When this 'banter' subsides, I also get a chance to catch up with some of the other coaches on coaching-related matters –"How was your game at the weekend?" "How's so-and-so getting on?" "What's your session tonight?" The small talk continues with one or two coaches as we make our way to get the footballs, bibs, cones and other kit that is required for the "session" ahead. Three or four boys are typically asked by the coaches to help carry this kit over to the training field. We walk through the main reception area and out onto the turf, where the intensity of the floodlights make the evening feel like daytime.

I'm stood on the side of the practice field at West-Side academy. As I've arrived early I decide to head out to the practice area early to watch some of the other age-groups practice, before beginning my own session. A large area on the 3G-astroturf is clearly marked out with yellow and blue cones, about 20-yards by 20-yards. Some under-12 age group players are stood inside the area, four in yellow bibs and four in red bibs. Some boys have their bibs inside-out. "Put your bibs on the right way," their coach says. They turn them the right way round. "And tuck your shirts in." They tuck their shirts into their shorts. Some have tucked their bibs into their shorts, too.

Four players wearing blue bibs stand outside the area, one on each side of the square to 'support' the players on the inside by moving along the perimeter to receive a pass. This is a 'basic possession practice,' they have done it many times before their coach reminds them. Their coach explains what he wants from the practice: quick passing, with ten passes scoring their team a goal. The players look focused. "Ready?" the

coach asks. A number of boys spring into action, they want the ball. The coach, using his feet, serves a football into a boy wearing yellow.

“Play!” he commands. The players run, sprint, here and there, shouting for the ball trying to get into space to receive a pass from their teammates. The boys begin passing and moving the ball quickly at a ‘good tempo.’ They zip the ball around on the floor expertly. “Good!” The players continue. Tap, tap, tap. The ball rolls off the area. “It’s dead, play from here.” The players react to the coaches’ call and spin quickly to face him. The coach ‘fires’ another ball into a boy wearing red this time. Tap, tap, tap, again they manoeuvre the ball around the area with precision and skill, using the outside players to help keep the ball in play. There are a few stumbles and wayward passes, but generally the coach seems pleased. “Really good tempo,” he encourages them. “Good start, move, move, keep it moving quick.” The practice continues. Twenty-minutes later the coach blows his whistle to signal the end of the practice. “In you come,” he commands, beckoning them towards him. The boys jog (some walk) towards their coach. “Last one in,” he shouts. They sprint towards him, arrive, and form a kind of semi-circle around their coach. The boy who is last to run in does five push-ups.

“Listen in boys,” the coach says, “well done, a few sloppy passes but that’s the tempo you need to have every session if you wanna even have a chance of being a pro at this club.” He adds: “If you don’t work hard then someone else out there will be working harder than you. And you know what that means?” They nod. It means they’ll be released (essentially kicked off the team) and someone else will take their place. The coach reinforces this idea by saying that there are many boys in West-Side who would love to be where they are right now.

The noise and chatter of young boys and grown men fills the air. We walk along the white line marking the outside of the field, which is occupied by those boys from the younger age groups and their coaches, coming to the end of their session. Boots and water bottles are dropped to the surface of the turf. Boys kneel and sit down, lacing up their boots and adjusting their shin pads, ready to begin the evening’s training session. There is a small area of Astroturf just off the main pitch where some of the boys begin to move around, backwards, forwards, side-to-side, passing a football to-and-fro, and

warming-up to begin the serious work of the session. “Get yourselves nice and warm lads,” I call over, “so we can get straight into it.” As soon as the younger boys leave the field, these ‘lads’ spill onto it, taking their place and firing footballs around across the half-pitch that we have to train on. Some tap a football repeatedly to each other with their feet, getting progressively faster. Others jog across the pitch, tapping a ball in front of them, changing direction with the insides and outsides of their feet. Every now and again, a ball flies into the empty net, nestling into the crisp white netting and producing a swooshing sound, other shots crash against the goal-frame, while mis-fired attempts rattle the perimeter fence. Amid this chaos the boys begin to ‘get together’ and form a more organised warm-up with some more co-ordinated movements between a set of cones. Similar things are happening across the field, where late-comers are lacing up boots and taking final swigs of water. “Fine!” the other boys call out, highlighting their teammates’ tardiness and indicating that a “fine” of jaffa-cakes or jelly-babies should be delivered to their coach on account of being late. As parents take up their positions on the outside of the perimeter fence, these final few boys join in with their teammates to “prepare” their bodies for what is to come; they move with short, sharp, dynamic movements, the ‘pace’ builds, becoming more intense. A train rumbles across the tracks just across the way, the repetition of the train moving over the same point on the tracks melts into the chatting, joking, shouting of boys and coaches, as faint four-way shadows created by the powerful criss-crossing artificial lights above flicker around each body that dances across the turf. This is training time at West-Side Football Club.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 COMING TO STUDY WEST-SIDE FOOTBALL ACADEMY

Although I have been paid-to-play football for most of my adult life, I never *really* ‘made the grade’ as a professional footballer. I am (in my own eyes, at least) a failed footballer. The story of how I came to study a professional football academy begins in my youth. Twice, aged twelve and fourteen, I was told “thanks, but no thanks” by a professional football club academy. Upon leaving secondary education, aged sixteen, I still had no offers to join a professional football club. Instead, still hopeful of a career in professional football, I enrolled at my local college to study A-Levels and signed up to the college football programme, run by the top semi-professional club in the area (at Football Conference level – the highest non-professional league in England). Essentially, this college programme was for the ‘best of the rest’; in other words, it was for those boys who had been released by local professional clubs at sixteen years of age, so they could get another chance at football, while gaining some qualifications. The training at college was demanding, but I loved it, and I was ‘coming along’ well as a footballer.

I continued to ‘impress,’ and at the end of my first year of college, aged seventeen, I signed my first (professional, paid) contract to be part of the first team squad. I played some first team games, earning generous praise from the coaches and fans. Occasionally, I even appeared in the regional newspapers. Through my efforts, I even made the England Schoolboys Under-18 squad, which was a team comprised of the best non-professional college-aged boys in the country. Things were looking up—football wise.

But with the increasing demands of football (on my time and on my attention) in college, my studies suffered; culminating in me leaving college with grades BDD at A-Level. This was well below my predicted grades. Perhaps because my marks suffered, I began to lose faith in my academic abilities. Thus, I turned down my university offers with hopes of making it as a professional footballer.

At nearly twenty-one years old, after a succession of managers, limited game-time, keyhole surgery to trim a tear in the cartilage in my knee, and four years of constantly trying to prove myself, I was 'let go.' One of the club directors (somewhat callously, I thought) told me this news, in the corridor, as I was leaving the club after a game. I felt like they were trying to usher me out, quietly. Perhaps this was protecting the others from the realisation that they, too, could lose it all.

I cried all the way home in the car, stopping on the way when the tears became too much. I was traumatised by this experience. I signed to play for a local club a few leagues lower. I had a torrid time, both on and off the field. After many games, most of which I felt I performed poorly in, I would stop at a local park on the way home and sit on a bench to think about where my life was going. I sat and the tears streamed down my face, and the thoughts recycled in my head over and over. Football was my life, and I had failed. I was a failure. I was lost.

Desperate to get back on track in my football career, I reapplied to university, got accepted, and joined the University of Bath's distinguished football programme. They offered full-time training and the chance to get back into the 'pro' game. All the players were enrolled on the Sports Performance foundation degree that fit neatly with their training schedule. Instead, shortly after celebrating my twenty-first birthday, I ended up on the Coach Education and Sports Development degree programme: I had applied for a place, hopefully, knowing that I did not (necessarily) have the grades. Perhaps my background in coaching or professional sport helped to sway the programme co-ordinators, or perhaps it was an administrative error: I never did find out for sure, and I wasn't about to question the decision. However, I was the only player whose classes clashed with the team's practices, and I was the only player living on-campus—something which the coaches prevented other players from doing.

My coach called it a 'distraction' to live on campus with the students. He wanted his players to live off-campus in houses with the other players. Those distractions, I believe, were vital in cultivating a more complex personal identity and a sociological imagination that lingered beneath my myopic desperation to access a career in professional football.

At university, I made intensely close friendships. I learned that a world existed beyond the football bubble; that I could go to a pub with friends and talk about big sociological ideas, not just the weekend's football scores. Gradually, as a footballer, I was now able to relax and enjoy the experience of just playing football, not being consumed by it. But, although my ability (and thus prospect to play professional) was now growing, my interest in becoming a professional footballer waned. Instead, I was increasingly fascinated by the things I could not understand or articulate as a child. These things, linked to theory, and layered with empirical research, gave voice to and documented experiences that I could connect with. The experience was an affirmation of how I felt inside, of my own intellectual torment, and of my own thoughts and ideas that I did not have the ability to articulate or the confidence to stand by.

Personally, as I have battled intellectually with my engagement and disengagement with sport (and at certain times my failure to do both), my sporting experiences in relation to sex, sexuality and gender also began to develop into sociological questions. My master identity had always been 'the football player,' but what were the foundations of my commitment, like hundreds of thousands of boys in the UK, to football? How had my football experiences shaped my relationships with other boys and men, girls and women, throughout my life?

As I was exposed to new people and ideas at university, I began to question the biological and essentialist myths, assumptions, and prejudices about men and women and their differences that exist within, and between, western societies, cultures, institutions, and individuals. Increasingly, it was through the lens of social constructionism that I found the most interesting and useful explanations of my experiences in relation to sport and the masculinity myself and others.

As my interest in the study of masculinities developed, my self-identity shifted from athlete-student, to student-athlete. I also began coaching. My individual circumstances, as an undergraduate student seeking to off-set the costs of tuition fees and student loans, led me to establish a professional career as a football coach during my time at university. It was during this time that I first met coaches from West-Side

football club academy, where I would eventually come to coach. In class, I read about the changing developments within football and masculinities and, combined with my own boyhood experiences, as well as my experiences of playing and coaching football, I was thoroughly engaged in developing this interest further. This thesis is a continuation of this interest.

My growing interest in sociology led me to undertake a PhD. With no funding forthcoming, I resolved to fund the PhD myself. As a part-time, self-funded PhD student working as a professional football coach, a unique set of circumstances emerged – although I did not immediately ‘join the dots’ together in terms of a research design. This is why I decided to study the experiences of boys in a professional football academy for my PhD.

In the coming years I began to recognise that my research is grounded-in and inseparable from my own lived-experiences, particularly those of ‘being’ a semi-professional footballer and ‘being’ a professional youth coach. Indeed, prior to beginning this study I had coached in youth academy football for five years, on average six hours per week (actual coaching time on the field). Since I began my PhD studies in October 2009 I was coaching for between eight and ten hours per week, also combining this with a semi-professional football career – at the time of beginning the PhD I had been playing semi-professionally for eight years, on average committing to four hours of training as well as weekend and midweek games, starting a season in August and ending the following year in May. In this respect, the preface narrative (“training time: floodlit nights at West-Side”) and this introduction are an attempt to illuminate my personal experiences, to ‘locate’ myself as someone who was completely captivated in the world of football, and as someone who has been immersed within the research setting I later came to study.

1.2 RESEARCH AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of this study is to examine, interpret and understand the social life-worlds of boys in a professional football academy, including their relationships with other boys and men in this setting. Specifically, the three different objectives of this thesis (stated below) link together in that they are illustrative of and intrinsically about

the formation of masculinity within this football club academy. The objectives of this thesis are:

- I. To explore (i) the social organisation of a professional football academy and (ii) representations of masculinity among coaches and youth players in this setting;
- II. To develop an understanding of what being 'friends' means within the social parameters of boys' football academy experience, and;
- III. To examine homophobia (a central tenet of traditional masculinity), and understandings of homosexuality and gay athletes among academy players.

1.3 POSITIONING THIS STUDY

Much research in this field in the past two decades has examined the world of professional football and the occupational experiences of professional footballers in the UK (Kelly and Waddington, 2006; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005; McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006; Roderick 2006ab; 2012ab) as well as the modern football apprenticeship and the experiences of 'professional phase' (16-21) year-old professional youth footballers (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Cushion and Jones; 2006; 2014; Magrath, Anderson, and Roberts, 2013; Monk, 2000; Monk and Russell, 2000; Parker, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006). Other research has addressed the experiences of professional football coaches (Potrac and Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, and Nelson, 2012; Nelson, Potrac, Gilbourne, Allanson, Gale, and Marshall, 2013), fans (Cashmore and Cleland, 2011; 2012; Cleland, 2013), and the relationship between children and association football in England (e.g. Pitchford, Brackenridge, Bringer, Cockburn, Nutt, Pawlaczek, and Russell, 2004).

Some recent research (e.g. Morley, Morgan, McKenna, and Nicholls, 2014) has focused on academy boys of similar age (13-15 years) as those in this thesis, although this has been through a 'talent development' lens, rather a critical sociological perspective. From a more critical perspective, Manley, Palmer and Roderick (2012) have explored the use of modern 'surveillance' technologies (e.g. video analysis) in youth football and rugby academies. Brown and Potrac (2009) examined the experiences of former elite (youth) footballers, retrospectively, that is, after they had been deselected or 'released.' Mitchell et al. (2014) have highlighted the deep levels

at which youth footballers (16-18 year olds) invest in an 'athletic identity.' Similarly, research by Brown and Potrac (2009) and McGillivray and McIntosh (2006) has also demonstrated the extent to which youth footballers routinely sacrifice social and educational aspects of their lives in the hope of becoming a professional footballer. This is all important research into a work-setting (professional football) in which Roderick (2006b, p.246) suggests players must contend with short-term careers and an "ever present possibility of career failure and rejection."

However, while a growing body of research in this field explores the experiences of youth (16-18 year old) 'apprentice' footballers at English professional football clubs (Cushion and Jones, 2006; 2014; Magrath, Anderson, and Roberts, 2013; Monk, 2000; Parker, 1996; 2006), few social researchers have explored the experiences of boys in 'foundation phase' (9-11 years) or 'youth phase' (12-16) age groups, in-the-moment: that is, while they are participating in a professional football academy. So underexplored is the professional football academy setting, that even five years after I began my own PhD research (I began in 2009), some (e.g. Mitchell et al., 2014), were still calling for more social research to explore and understand the youth development/academy environment created by individual clubs, so that more could be learned about what goes on at those levels, and thus how boys experiences at earlier levels of the professional football industry might help social scientists to understand how athletic identities develop. It is at this juncture – of a unique, underexplored, and hard-to-reach population – that I situate my own social research on 14-15 year old boys in a professional football club academy.

1.4 ENGLISH FOOTBALL ACADEMIES AND CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

The recent implementation of the English Premier League's (EPL) Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) in English professional football academies (proposal accepted in 2011 and beginning season 2012/2013), brings fresh importance to any study of boys' experiences in professional football academies. At its core, the EPPP advocates an increase in the time that boys aged 8-16 years old must spend training and preparing at their clubs for a career in the professional football industry. As the

Director of Youth at the Premier League, Ged Roddy, who led the Working Group that created the EPPP, notes⁴:

The new system will create greater access to players so that they can receive more time to train and prepare effectively for a career in the Barclays Premier League. These changes will raise the intensity of the Academy system, leading to improved education and career support programmes being rolled out to ensure every player is provided with holistic support for all of his development.

When you strip it down to its most fundamental, the EPPP is about creating an environment where a local boy, developed in his local club from eight or nine years of age, can go on to pull on a first-team shirt of the club that he has grown up at.

This is every boy's dream and, while in reality only a lucky few will achieve it, the EPPP for all its focus on the science of elite development sets out to ensure that this dream can remain a reality for the next generation of young players.

In the Premier League's *Charter for Academy Players and Parents* (Season 2013/2014), players and parents are also advised (on p.8, in a paragraph of eight lines under the heading "Leaving the Academy") that: "No Academy can guarantee that a player will become a professional." The charter also pledges that: "If your Club does not wish to extend your registration, it is expected to provide support by, for example, helping to identify opportunities for you to continue your football career elsewhere." Players and parents are directed to a "Feedback" and complaints section in the charter (section 7), although no further information on developing careers elsewhere (inside or outside of football) is given here. The Elite Player Performance Plan (May 2011) states (p.49): "A programme which supports all players onto their next step if/when they are released from the club should also be available." Moreover, it states (p.77): "If a player is released...players should be provided with the opportunity to access career guidance." What format this guidance would take and how it would be accessed by released youth players (and their parents) is unclear from both the *Charter* and *EPPP* documents.

It is important to note from the outset of this thesis that the data collection for my own study of a professional football academy was completed prior to the implementation of

⁴ Premier League website, retrieved from: <http://www.premierleague.com/content/premierleague/en-gb/youth/elite-player-performance-plan.html>

the EPPP, at what was once a Centre of Excellence. However, for the sake of maintaining relevance in contemporary debates about professional football and youth training programmes, I have opted to embrace the Academy moniker to describe the research setting being explored. Ultimately, I argue that the implementation of the EPPP (and thus whether the setting is a Centre of Excellence or an Academy) does not detract from my own findings in any way. If anything, the ratcheting up of 'contact time' boys will now experience being in professional football academies under EPPP adds an increased importance to future studies in this field. In all other respects (for example culturally, structurally, and economically), the aims of the professional football industry remain the same, and its youth academies play the same role in feeding this industry with the next generation of young players. The work of scholars such as Bourke (2003), Holt and Mitchell (2006), and Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne and Richardson (2010), for example, reinforce the idea that the primary objective of youth development programmes at professional football clubs is to produce players for the 'first team,' that is, the professional level. As Stratton, Reilly, Richardson, and Williams (2004, p.201) note, elite football academies exist to "develop players for the first team or (at least) generate income through the sale of "marketable assets". This may seem to be an obvious statement, but it is an important one in the context of this thesis.

1.5 THE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL INDUSTRY

Few industries so intensively recruit and train potential workers from such a young age as those in the occupational field of professional football. During any given year, there are approximately 10,000 boys aged between eight and sixteen years-old in the youth development programs (academies) of the 92 English professional football clubs⁵. In these academies, boys are actively recruited by a network of scouts who search out the best talent, and those who become 'signed' to an academy participate in a training program in which they travel to other professional clubs' academies so that these young players can test their skills against one another. With just (approximately) 1400 playing positions available at each academy age group (Under-9s to Under-16s) in any one season, competition for places is intense. To 'make it' as a professional football

⁵ Increasingly, football clubs below this level (traditionally identified as semi-professional, amateur, or non-league) are also now professional and have established their own football academies for the purposes of recruiting young talented boys into their football clubs.

player in what parts of English society values as the ‘beautiful game’ (a rhetoric of prestige, national heroes, and the chance to become rich at a young age, all while playing a game they are thought to love, [c.f. McGill, 2001]), and to matriculate to the highest professional ranks has been described by sports writer and journalist Chris Green (2009) as *Every Boy’s Dream*. This is the phrase echoed in the statement quoted earlier by Ged Roddy, the Director of Youth at the Premier League.

However, despite romanticised notions of professional football, the social reality of the industry (also highlighted in Ged Roddy’s statement) is that few boys who become signed to a professional football club academy and embark upon a journey toward becoming a professional footballer are likely to succeed in acquiring contracts as professional football players (Anderson and Miller, 2011, suggest 10%) – and of the boys who do reach this ‘golden ticket’ into the game only one out of four will remain in the game as professional football players past their twenty-first birthday (c.f. Monk, 2000; Harding, 2003). According to Monk’s (2000) estimations, at the professional levels this represents an occupational attrition rate of over seventy-five percent, and this figure does not even factor in the large numbers of academy footballers who do not even make it that far; thus evidencing the occupational insecurity of life in professional football and an institutionalisation of mass rejection. As Ryan Mason, a current professional footballer with Tottenham Hotspur, noted in an interview in the *Telegraph* newspaper (Williams, 2009)⁶ when he was seventeen years old:

“I’ve seen around 100 boys released,” he says. One was a good friend. “We’d been close for about six years, our families too. My dad would drive us [to training] on a Monday and his dad would do Wednesday, and then he got released.” He shrugs. “But that’s football isn’t it?”

Highlighting another important structural aspect of the professional football industry, Roderick (2006ab) notes that the working lives of professional footballers is characterized most fundamentally by having to perform their work in teams. Moreover, demonstrating how social organisation and structural constraints can influence group culture, Roderick (2006b, p.251) points out that while professional footballers must

⁶ “Football academies: kicking and screaming” by Sally Williams, 04 Mar 2009, in the *Telegraph* newspaper.

perform together in matches to achieve success, the social reality of this industry is that when only eleven players can be selected for any one game from a squad of sometimes thirty professionals, high levels of internal competition are inevitable with players quite willing to “shit on each other,” that is, to ruthlessly undermine and outmanoeuvre teammates to secure popularity among other players and management. More generally among athletes, this strict adherence to sporting norms, as a way of making it to the next level, is something Hughes and Coakley (1991) have previously described as over-conformity to the sport ethic.

In a similar vein, Parker (1996, p.1), describing the culture and lived-experiences of professional and youth players, has suggested that the occupational domain of professional football “revolves primarily around a strict diet of authoritarianism, ruthlessness and hyper-masculine work-place practice.” According to Kelly and Waddington (2006, p.151), young players are socialised (through social interactions with teammates and opponents and exposure to the structural constraints of the industry) into a professional working environment that is “aggressive, tough, masculine, and at all times violent.” Highlighting the need for players to adopt a particular footballer identity and performance in contrast to their “everyday self,” Kelly and Waddington (*ibid*), drawing on Roderick (2006a), suggest that:

...these values are reflected in workplace behaviours and in the socialization and social control of young players. Roderick (2006: 36) noted the advice of a coach to his young player at an English Premier League club: ‘Smile, be happy in your life, but when you cross that line whether it be for training or a match, you’ve got to become a bastard. You’ve got to be a hard, tough bastard.’

Magee (1998, p.129) makes a similar observation when he describes football culture as one in which players are taught to “look after themselves” through the use of physical aggression as well as verbal abuse and intimidation of other players. Fleshing out the everyday lived experience of boys and men within the professional football culture, Parker (2006, p.696-697) has described the use of “wind-ups” and “ripping” among football players, where insults would be given and taken, often sexually explicit and highly derogatory in nature, until one player would “snap,” that is, lose their cool, and react with aggression. Developing an increased personal tolerance and passivity to verbal chastisement, therefore, and an ability to take insults as well as dish them

out, was deemed a highly-esteemed skill among apprentice players for accumulating peer group credibility (Parker, 2006).

Furthermore, the pressure generated through competition between teammates, as well as the pressures to engage in 'banter' as described above, is also confounded by the pressures that managers and coaches face to 'get results' and the subsequent managerial methods by which they attempt to exert authority and control, to ensure players perform to a high standard. Highlighting the precarious and insecure nature of the work of professional footballers, Roderick (2006b, p.251) notes: "the player as worker is put under pressure to perform and produce results or else face replacement." Indeed, some attempts at managerial control are outlined by Kelly and Waddington (2006) who describe managerial practices in football as rife with abuse, intimidation and violence. In a similar vein, Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne and Nelson (2012) highlight the competitive, calculating, and often uncaring world of performance football coaching, utilising auto-ethnographic data from the first author's (Potrac's) foray into coaching in a professional football academy. Potrac et al.'s (2012) auto-ethnographic work is helpful in understanding how coaches, too, can feel as though their job security is directly related to their last coaching performance, leading to the adoption of individualistic working strategies that afford little trust to fellow coaches and managers. Reflecting on his time as a coach and setting the scene of what it is like to coach in a professional football club academy, Potrac (2012, p.80) notes:

Underneath a veil of co-operation, degrees of selfishness and 'back-stabbing' were easily discernible; personal agendas dominated. I wanted to do well. I wanted to better myself. I needed to protect myself. While no one would admit it, each of us coaches was trying to outperform the other to preserve a place in a very competitive order.

Summarizing the characteristics of professional football, Parker (2001, p.59) suggests that the industry "is a strictly gendered affair. Its relational dynamics, its working practices, its commercial ventures, its promotional interests, are replete with images of maleness." These are thought to be the social conditions – the reality of life in the professional game – which lay ahead of a small number of boys currently participating in professional football academies.

In recent years, however, some research both in the UK (e.g. Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010; Magrath, Roberts, and Anderson, 2013; Anderson and McCormack, 2014) and the U.S. (e.g. Adams, 2011; Anderson and Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2012; Anderson, 2014) has articulated a changing social landscape when it comes to the dynamics of male competitive sports teams. Contrasting previous representations of professional football culture, for example, is the recent research on masculinities among academy (16-18 year old) footballers conducted by Magrath, Roberts, and Anderson (2013). While the data for my own research was generated (between 2010 and 2012) before that of Magrath et al. and thus maintains its originality of inquiry, their research provides an important alternative and supplementary narrative when it comes to thinking about youth and masculinities in the professional football context. Drawing on interview data with twenty-two young male participants, they note (ibid, p.14): “Results are clear: among the 22 future athletes we interviewed, they are unbothered by the issue of gays in sport.” Magrath et al.’s work points to an increasing ‘inclusivity’ (c.f. Anderson 2009) in the context of professional sports. Building on Magrath et al.’s (2013) findings, my own research examines similar themes in relation to 14-15 year old boys within a professional football club youth academy.

In addition to the aforementioned research by Magrath et al. (2013), the recent work of Cleland (2013, 2014, 2015) and colleagues (Cashmore and Cleland, 2011; 2012) offers useful insights into masculinities in the world of English professional football. Cashmore and Cleland’s (2012) large-scale quantitative internet-based survey of 3,500 professional football fans found that 93 percent of participants stated that there was no place for homophobia in football, also finding that some of these same fans explained their own use of homophobic abuse as good-humoured banter or “stick.” Interestingly, Cashmore and Cleland’s (2012, p.385) findings suggest that football fans believe it is professional football clubs and agents who are the ‘problem’ when it comes to creating a more supportive environment for gay athletes, *not* the fans. Cashmore and Cleland assert their findings as evidence of decreasing homophobia in football fandom, and a growing trend in what Anderson (2009) has called *inclusive masculinities*, a brand of masculinity that is in contrast to the *orthodox* forms of masculinity represented in the previously discussed research on professional football

settings (c.f. Parker, 2001; 2006; Roderick, 2006ab; Kelly and Waddington, 2006; Magee, 1998). Adding further weight to the notion of a changing sporting culture, Cleland (2014, p.1282) highlights that recent media narratives around the coming-out of Swedish amateur footballer Anton Hysén (the first openly gay footballer since Justin Fashanu when he came out in 1990 to a backlash of homophobia) “challenged orthodox masculinity by portraying homophobia in a negative light.” Future research on media narratives around the coming out experiences of openly gay U.S. soccer player Robbie Rogers will likely reinforce the assertion of a cultural shift in the direction that Cleland (2014) has identified.

The research of Cashmore and Cleland (2012), Magrath et al. (2013), Anderson (2009), and my own, among others (c.f. McCormack and Anderson, 2014; Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010; Adams, 2011; Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Campbell, Cothren, Rogers, Kistler, Osowski, Greenauer, and End, 2011; Cleland, 2013; 2014), acknowledges a potential cultural shift in sporting subcultures (in Western societies) toward more progressive forms of masculinity, and suggests that these progressive values are now beginning to emerge among multiple stakeholders in the traditionally conservative arena of professional football.

1.6 STUDYING A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL ACADEMY

The research undertaken for this thesis is about the experiences of adolescent boys – youth footballers – in a professional performance-oriented sport ‘academy’ context. To be clear, by performance-oriented, I mean that the aims of the football academy are not to increase participation. They are not participation-oriented in the way that local, grassroots, community-based sport clubs, after school clubs, or children’s summer activity-camps might be. Instead, as noted above, the football academy exists as a mechanism to ensure new generations of young players are ready to enter the professional levels aged eighteen. Bearing this distinction in mind, the central issue of this research is a concern with the day-to-day human relationships and lived-experiences of those people embroiled within an English professional football academy. As one attempt to understand the structural and cultural dynamics of the football academy, this study sheds some light on the game of football, and brings

something new to the sociological understanding of the processes that boys within football academies go through in order to become professional footballers.

As Sociologist Norbert Elias (1970) has noted, taking a step back and developing an understanding of the social processes that humans go through *among* other human beings, is central to understanding what society is about. In this broad sense, borrowing from Elias (1970, p.120), this study is an attempt to capture individuals – adolescent, male, academy players – growing, changing, and “still becoming,” while acknowledging that they do not do so independently of others. Importantly, therefore, since children are, as Elias suggests (*ibid*, p.121), *dependent* and “learn from others how to speak and even how to think,” this thesis taps into critical sociological questions about the social, emotional, and psychological impact of elite sporting cultures on future generations, and what (social) learning (and teaching) among children is happening within such institutions today. In terms of current literature, social research on football academies is severely lacking. My thesis is an attempt to begin to address this paucity.

1.7 THESIS OUTLINE AND CHAPTERS

In the PREFACE to this thesis, I have drawn on three short field notes to paint a picture of life at West-Side, the football academy which is the setting for this PhD study. In CHAPTER ONE (the introduction) of this thesis, I have explained how I came to study gender and sport, and have set out the personal circumstances which led me to be coaching at West-Side football academy. This personal journey is important to this thesis, since it is interwoven with the researcher-position that I eventually adopted for this study of masculinities, competition and friendship in a professional football academy. In this introduction I have also outlined the context of the study setting, including the social reality of life in the industry of professional football and football academies as mechanisms of sustaining this industry.

In CHAPTER TWO of the thesis, I explore the experiences of youth in competitive sport. While my initial framework for understanding competitive sport emerged from a gender and masculinities perspective, in this part of the thesis I also give consideration to broader social, cultural, economic, and political influences on the popular practice of

organised sport. In doing so, I locate boys' competitive sport experiences (within which the boys of West-Side are embroiled) within a Western market-driven 'neoliberal' society. In line with Coakley's (2011) analysis of elite, organised, competitive, commercial sport (EOCCS), I frame the professional football industry as an EOCCS and as an example of 'neoliberal' practices. This discussion of neoliberalism marks a departure from the kinds of (masculinities) literature I had previously engaged with and has proved useful in foregrounding this research and in understanding the function of youth sport and elite sport academies; that is, in thinking about professional sports academies as mechanisms or manifestations of neoliberal values and beliefs, and thinking about academy footballers as having market-value.

In CHAPTER THREE, I return to gender and masculinities. Here, I develop some of the arguments made in CHAPTER ONE and CHAPTER TWO by exploring the relationship between gender, masculinities and sport. I discuss sport as a historically 'gendered' and 'gendering' institution (c.f. Messner, 1990), and outline some of the ways in which sport and masculinity may permeate the early childhood development and everyday experiences of boys and men. In this chapter, I break the discussion down into two main sections, in which I explore both 'traditional' accounts of sporting masculinities and gender relations and also take into account a growing body of contemporary research on these themes. I also discuss professional football as a changing social landscape. All this is to better understand the life-worlds of boys growing up in contemporary Western societies, today, and to engage with some of the most recent literature in this field suggesting that masculinities are becoming more progressive and 'inclusive' (c.f. Anderson, 2009).

CHAPTER FOUR provides the theoretical framework of this thesis. Here, I provide a somewhat more abstract, yet necessary, discussion of some relevant theoretical concepts around (social) identities, institutions, and the social construction of 'the self' (Goffman, 1961; Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and the development of masculinities/homophobia (Connell, 1987, 1995; Anderson, 2005, 2009; Bridges, 2014). These are some ways of thinking about the social experiences that are discussed in the later empirical chapters. In this chapter, my aim was to flesh out some understanding about what the 'changing social landscape' means for men,

masculinities, and their relationship to gender relations, homophobia and social (in)equality. The work of Connell on hegemonic masculinities (1987, 1995, 2005) is prominent in this discussion. However, the utility of Connell's theorising has been challenged by the work of Anderson (2009) on inclusive masculinities, and this is something I also take account of. Both Connell's and Anderson's work inform the analysis chapters in this thesis, while the concept of *hybrid* masculinities is also relevant (c.f. Demetriou, 2001; Bridges, 2014).

Together with CHAPTER FOUR, CHAPTER FIVE lays the methodological foundations for this research, including a discussion of the ethnographic methods of participant-observation and in-depth interviewing that I used in generating data for this thesis. This data was generated as part of my pre-existing immersion 'in the field' as an academy coach at West-Side football club. This methodology chapter also outlines the challenges and ethical considerations of undertaking sociological research with young people in the relatively closed social world of professional football, and addresses ethical issues related to the research design of this thesis. The subsequent four chapters (CHAPTER SIX, CHAPTER SEVEN, CHAPTER EIGHT and CHAPTER NINE) provide the empirical parts of this thesis, where the rich data from observations and interviews is presented and analysed; CHAPTER SIX focuses on the competitive culture and context of West-Side academy (a pseudonym) while CHAPTER SEVEN explores the way that (primarily orthodox) masculinities are represented in interactions between coaches and academy players.

Building on this, CHAPTER EIGHT explores how the design of institutional life – that is, the competitive social organisation, culture and context of the academy – spills into boys' peer-relationships, their levels of 'emotional proximity' (Anderson, 2009), and their conceptualisation of friendships, both inside and outside the academy setting, where some were left emotionally-disconnected and alienated from one another. Next, CHAPTER NINE, further exploring masculinities and a traditionally central tenet of masculinity (homophobia), focuses on the attitudes toward homosexuality and gay footballers among the boys at West-Side football academy. In this chapter, I highlight some of the progressive attitudes toward homosexuality espoused by boys at West-Side, although I retain caution in describing these boys as conclusively "inclusive" in

the way that Anderson (2009) has described inclusive masculinities. I also note some contradictions between espoused inclusive attitudes and observed behaviours, as well as the hesitancy of some of these boys to publicly support gay peers.

Finally, drawing on the ideas of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987, 1995), inclusive masculinities (Anderson, 2009), and hybrid masculinities (c.f. Demetriou, 2001; Bridges, 2014), CHAPTER TEN brings all the themes of the empirical chapters into a coherent discussion. In this final chapter, I conclude the thesis with some thoughts on the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions of this research, along with some practical implications of the findings presented, and some potential avenues and considerations for future research.

CHAPTER 2: COMPETITIVE YOUTH SPORT EXPERIENCES AND NEOLIBERALISM

2.1 INTRODUCTION

According to Stratton et al. (2004), youth football academies function as a way for professional football clubs to produce ‘talent’ to improve their own ‘first team’ or as ‘products’ to sell on to other clubs for profit. Young boys in football academies, therefore, can be conceptualised as having a (potential) market-value. As noted in the INTRODUCTION to this thesis, the English Premier League’s implementation of the EPPP (Elite Player Performance Plan) for increasing the training time for 8-16 year old boys in professional football academies represents a ratcheting-up of the demand for the time of young academy footballers and their families and an increasing drive toward producing what Stratton et al. (2004, p.201) have described as “marketable assets”.

While this thesis is about the experiences of youth footballers in a professional, competitive sport context (predominantly instigated from a masculinities perspective – see CHAPTER THREE and CHAPTER FOUR), in this chapter I consider some broad perspectives on sport and society, utilising existing literature to locate the importance and the influence of the cultural practice of organised, competitive sport within Western late-capitalist, market-driven, consumer-focused, media-saturated, neoliberal societies. While acknowledging that my own research does not focus on professional (elite) athletes per se, it is important to note that it *does* focus on the youth academy of a professional football club, and is thus a mechanism of professional (elite) sport. Stratton et al.’s (2004) description of youth elite sports academies as tied to performance and profit makes this clear.

It is in this respect that I describe my research as examining an elite sporting context, and I do this in contrast to social research that examines sport outside of the professional performance-oriented context. Adopting a critical perspective of sport, I give consideration to the claims of empirical research on this topic; that is, research which outlines some of the potential social, emotional and psychological costs of the extreme end of sport (i.e. elite, competitive forms) at both its adult, professional levels and – more directly relevant to the empirical chapters of this thesis – its youth levels.

From here, I position (elite, youth) sport within a wider framework of political, economic, cultural, and social tensions, and subsequently explore its role in the everyday organisation of human lives in contemporary 21st Century Western societies.

2.2 YOUTH SPORT EXPERIENCES: SOME PSYCHO-SOCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the fact that one's own 'success' is the flip-side of another's 'failure,' organized sport encourages boys to view other boys not as intimates, but as rivals. Within the competitive world, the chief question a boy may ask himself when confronted with another boy is, 'Can I take him?'

(Messner, 1992, p.34)

From a sociological perspective and an analysis of youth sport experiences through the lens of gender, U.S. sociologist Michael Messner (1992) suggests that early sport-related play is often implicitly perceived by boys as something "fun" that they can engage in with other males, contributing to a long-term process of "bonding" first with fathers, uncles, and brothers, and then (often "through" adult-organised sport) with peers of similar ages. Summarising this process, Messner (1992, p.33) observes that:

Young boys may initially find that playing competitively gives them the opportunity to experience emotionally "safe" connections with others. But once enmeshed in sport as an institution, they are confronted by two interrelated realities – hierarchy and homophobia – that undermine the possibility of boys' transcending their fears of intimacy and developing truly close relationships with others.

Moreover, Messner (1987) has suggested that in the hierarchical institution of sport it is not simply participating, but *winning* which is key to boys' experiences. Messner (1987) draws on Schafer's (1975) notion of *conditional self-worth* to argue that, through the processes of sport participation, boys' identities become increasingly contingent upon winning. In this socially-constructed life-world, in which being a winner constitutes success, and success means social acceptance, self-worth becomes *conditional* upon winning. According to Messner (1987), functioning within a social-world within which one's sense of self-worth is predicated on an ethos of only being *as good as your last game*, boys become slaves to competition. Moreover, as noted by Messner (1992) in the opening quotation of this section, these narrow definitions of success are intensified as boys matriculate up the ranks and become increasingly important in defining boys' identities.

While I revisit in much more depth the inter-connections between notions of gender, youth, and sport in a later chapter (CHAPTER THREE), it is important to consider at this stage, as Michael Messner's work suggests, that a web of (i) performance production, (ii) hierarchy, (iii) homophobia, and (iv) competition and rivalry *can* entangle young boys and eat into their life-world as they negotiate life from early childhood *games* in(to) elite competitive *sport* settings. In this regard, a key contribution of Messner's scholarship, as a pioneer in the study of organised sport and its relationship to male identity development, has been to highlight the potential of (adult-organised) competitive sport to distort the very nature of boys' closest peer relationships. This was not to say that many boys did not have their closest friends in sport; many did. Rather, what Messner pointed out was that the *nature* of these friendships were emotionally and physically limited and limiting.

Complimenting Michael Messner's (1987, 1992) claims about sport being perceived as an emotionally "safe" space for children to connect (i.e. become "friends") with others, multiple researchers from another perspective, developmental-psychology, have consistently identified *youth friendship quality* as a critical determinant of a variety of important variables such as overall satisfaction with peer interactions, contextual emotional health, peer acceptance and rejection, enhanced motivation, behavioural difficulties, and coping (e.g., Coie and Cillessen, 1993; Hartup, 1989; Ladd, 1999; Newcombe and Bagwell, 1995; Parker and Asher, 1993; Parker and Gottman, 1989). Providing more recent evidence, others (e.g., Carr, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Weiss and Smith, 1999; 2002; Smith, 2003) have also recognised these claims, noting that youngsters' relationships with their peers in sport-related contexts have a *significant* role to play in shaping their broader mental health and wellbeing.

More specifically, Weiss and Smith (1999) have noted that dimensions of friendship quality in youth sport such as companionship, emotional support, loyalty and intimacy, similarity, conflict resolution, and experiences of conflict reflect some of the key functions of friendship quality. It has been identified that when youngsters are able to positively experience these aspects of friendships in the context of competitive sport then their commitment, enjoyment, and sustained involvement in the sport is enhanced (e.g., Ullrich-French and Smith, 2006; Weiss and Smith, 2002).

The work of Carr and colleagues (e.g., Carr, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Carr and Fitzpatrick, 2011) on peer relationships in sport from an attachment-theory⁷ perspective has highlighted the importance (for mental wellbeing) of youngsters being able to develop friendships and bonds characterised by a deep sense of emotional connection, care, and security (one's friends are viewed as a source of safety and emotional comfort during times of threat or emotional need). Carr (2012b) has also discussed the implications that such close bonds (or lack of) in the context of sport may have for how individuals go about "relating" outside of sport. On this note, some developmental findings (e.g. Berndt and Perry, 1986; Newcomb and Bagwell, 1995) have suggested age differences in the ways that younger players describe friendships (i.e. more in terms of spending time together) and the ways that older youths characterise their sport friendships (i.e. more in terms of psychological intimacy, self-disclosure, faithfulness, sharing beliefs and values).

Others in this field (e.g. Ommundsen, 2005; Patrick, Ryan, Allfeld-Liro, Fredricks, Hruda and Eccles, 1999; Zarbatany, McDougall, and Hymel, 2000) have identified a number of ways that involvement in competitive sport may be a significant impediment to peer relationships and friendship formation. For example, a study by Patrick et al. (1999) examined adolescents' peer relationship experiences in a sample of youth who had been selected for talent development programs (due to normative success) in the fields of art, sport, music and drama. While Patrick et al. (1999) found no clear differences between the various performance domains, there were interesting differences between talent activities that were cited as "school-based" (i.e., sport teams, band, and choir) and "non-school-based" (i.e., non-school sports organisations, dance, and piano). Specifically, adolescents involved in talent contexts that were not developed and conducted within a school-based setting were identified as more likely to see themselves as facing "a choice" between their "talent based activity" and

⁷ While an in-depth discussion of the principles of attachment-theory is beyond the scope of my own work, it is a useful aside to note that the central tenet of Bowlby's ideas (1969/1982, 1973, 1979/2005, 1980) are situated around "the notion that early childhood lays the foundations for the development of personality through the life-span;" that is, children form *attachments* (internal working models) with a primary *caregiver* (or caregivers) and the quality/pattern/tone of these attachments (secure, insecure-ambivalent, insecure avoidant) depend "upon their experiences and perception of caregiver availability, ability, responsiveness, and willingness in relation to their attachment needs" (Carr, 2012, p.6).

absorption in their school-based social relationships. According to Patrick et al. (1999), for school-based activities this was less of a concern as adolescents felt that the relationships that formed a critical part of their social life could be simultaneously maintained whilst developing their talents. Such findings raise interesting issues related to the role of certain non-school-based contexts with regards to inhibiting the maintenance of peer relationships in young people.

Furthermore, where (specifically) boys' involvement in team sports is concerned, Zabatany et al. (2000) have noted that participation may be associated with lower levels of intimacy within friendships because boys' focus on status acquisition (what Messner alluded to as *hierarchy*) is argued to have a suppressive effect on 'intimacy skills' (p.64), leaving boys feeling unable to disclose weakness which ultimately limits emotional connection among friends. In a similar study, Ommundsen et al. (2005) have suggested that being in *conflict* with a "best friend" is a *typical* experience of young male soccer players. Ommundsen et al. (2005) have specifically identified that performance-oriented cultures in sport (as opposed to participatory cultures) seem to inhibit positive friendship qualities by creating a competitive sporting environment which encourages the perception that team-mates are rivals and dampens the likelihood of intimacy and closeness.

In summary, what the above research suggests so far is that a critical paradox exists within the world of adult-organised youth sport. The paradox is this: that, while intimate friendships are highly beneficial for young people in sport (e.g. as a psycho-social "buffer" against dampened mental health and depression), such social relationships may be difficult to establish, maintain, and develop, particularly against the backdrop of an elite sports culture which structures and centralises competitiveness as "healthy" and winning as "success" in the lives of youth. However, since the above research draws on the experiences of youth in organised and competitive sport, but not *elite* and *commercial* (i.e. professional) sport, it is necessary, in line with Weiss and Smith's (1999) suggestion that discussions of youth sport must consider the particular motivational-climate under scrutiny, to develop a discussion of research exploring youth sport participation at the "extreme end" of the sport spectrum.

2.3 EXPLORING THE 'EXTREME END' OF THE COMPETITIVE SPORT SPECTRUM

While some have noted positive health behaviours associated with sport-participation (e.g. Pate, Trost, Levin and Dowda, 2000), there are some signs that athletes who progress through the sports system may experience a less-clear association with such benefits. Over the past few decades, increasing attention has been paid to the psycho-social well-being of elite athletes, who invest heavily, both physically and mentally, dealing with tremendous pressures, to become the best in their sport. While regular recreational, participation-focused physical activities may represent a positive physical, psychological, and social outlet for many people and provide the setting for enhanced psychological well-being and reduced risks of cardiovascular disease and other illnesses (e.g. Biddle, Fox, Boutcher, and Faulkner, 2000; Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2005), there is evidence (e.g. Chatzisarantis and Hagger, 2007) that certain forms of physical activities such as highly competitive sport may undermine functions of well-being.

Further highlighting the discrepancies between the 'realities' of competitive forms of sport and the public representation/conflation of sport/physical activity, an increasing body of research has emerged which throws into question the psycho-social value of the 'extreme end' of the competitive sport spectrum. For example, researchers have identified that athletes demonstrate an increased risk for dampened mental health and suicide (e.g., Baum, 2005; Kokotailo, Henry, and Kosciak, 1996), higher prevalence of subclinical and clinical (Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Anorexia Athletica) eating disorders (Sundgot-Borgen and Torstveit, 2004), and significant risk of mental health and well-being struggles following retirement, linked to an extended inability to focus upon identity development *outside* of the pursuit of athletic goals and success (see Baum, 2005). Some research (e.g. Leddy, Lambert, and Ogles, 1994; Smith and Sparkes, 2005) has also noted the emergence of depression and anxiety in individuals suffering season or career-ending injuries. More recently, Brown and Potrac (2009) have noted that the development of a strong athletic identity in youth footballers contributed to considerable levels of psychological and emotional distress (anxiety, fear, depression, anger, and humiliation) upon deselection. Moreover, Sparkes (2000) has suggested that involuntary retirement from sport should be considered to be a

source of 'biographical disruption' that interrupts the narrative coherence of a person's life. Thus, while elite level athletes are typically depicted as being "mentally tough" (Connaughton, Wade, Hanton, and Jones, 2008), and while many of these women and men may be highly resilient individuals, this does not make them immune from psycho-social distress.

Indeed, providing real-life examples of this, some elite athletes themselves have even spoken frankly of the lived experiences of a lifetime in professional sport. As Andre Agassi (2009, p.3) suggests in his autobiography *Open*, some athletes may even hate their sport "with a dark and secret passion." He writes (ibid, 2009, p.27):

I hate tennis, hate it with all my heart, and still I keep playing, keep hitting all morning, and all afternoon, because I have no choice. No matter how much I want to stop, I don't. I keep begging myself to stop, and I keep playing, and this gap, this contradiction between what I want to do and what I actually do feels like the core of my life.

Yet because sport is their life, through which they have 'made their living' since childhood and subsequently formed a one-dimensional 'athletic identity' (c.f. Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder, 1993; Wiechman and Williams, 1997), the prospect of retirement can be terrifying for many athletes. This is illuminated in Agassi's (2009, p.7-8) reflections on the build-up to the final tennis match of his professional career:

Standing at the bathroom mirror...I see that golden haired boy who hated tennis, and I wonder how he would view this bald man, who still hates tennis and yet still plays...Please let this be over. I'm not ready for it to be over [p.7]....But if tennis is life, then what follows tennis must be the unknowable void. The thought makes me cold [p.8].

Ultimately, for some authors (e.g., Anderson, 2013; Coakley, 1992; Murphy and Waddington, 2007), a pressing concern is the identification of *how* professional competitive sport might *compromise* psycho-social wellbeing. Viewed through this lens, the hijacking and subjugation of athletes' *lives* to the pursuit of normative success, performance production, and entertainment is, in the bigger picture, perhaps a significant threat to their spiritual, psycho-social, and physical wellbeing and the extent to which they are required, seduced, and enticed into subjugating such wellbeing for these values might (at worst) even be considered exploitative and inhumane (e.g.,

Anderson, 2013). As Pipe (2001, p.196) has provocatively suggested: “In “surrendering” their children to sport, parents may unwittingly be exposing them to behaviours which in other settings would be seen as child abuse.”

In short, some literature indicates that, contrary to popular depictions of elite athletes as enjoying the ‘good’ life, sport may be infected by the same market-driven economic and political ‘goods’ life philosophy as other industries; one which encourages employees to be the best and/or induces negative affects to psycho-social and spiritual health (see for example, Wilhelm, Kovess, Rios-Seidet, and Finch, 2004, for a discussion of occupations more prone to depression [e.g. lawyers, teachers, counsellors], increased risk of suicide [e.g. doctors, dentists, vets, nurses, social workers] and higher risk of alcohol and substance abuse [e.g. entertainers, physicians, salespeople, and military personnel]). Due to some of its (arguably) unique organisational structures, the professional sports industry may even supplement some of these problems of contemporary work-related stress.

Indeed, sociologist Jay Coakley (1992) provides an illustrative example of athletes negotiating psycho-social well-being in his analysis of *burnout* (i.e. psychological, emotional, and/or physical withdrawal due to chronic stress) in adolescent athletes. Acknowledging the tendency of traditional frameworks of (psychological) thinking to view society as fundamentally fair, and therefore, using a “vocabulary of stress” (ibid, p.272), to view burnout among young athletes as a problematic characteristic of *individuals*, Coakley observes that treatment for burnout, and equally, attempts to pre-empt the potential for burnout, has typically called for “new and more effective controls to be exerted over the lives of young athletes” (Coakley, 1992, p.272) to help them cope with stress and adjust to their sporting lives, rather than imagining strategies to change the real root of the problems – the social organisation of competitive sport itself, that is, *who* controls sport and how much power athletes have over their own lives. Coakley’s (1992) insightful social perspective of a ‘psychological problem’ leads him to reframe burnout as a social problem “rooted in the social organization of high performance sport itself” whereby “young athletes become disempowered to the point of realizing that sport participation has become a developmental dead-end for them

and that they no longer have any meaningful control over important parts of their lives” (p.272-273).

Re-reading Andre Agassi’s autobiographical comments about his childhood alongside Coakley’s analysis of burnout sheds fresh light on the experiences of young people in elite sport contexts: indeed, for many young athletes being so good at something from such a young age means that participation continues to the point that it becomes the only thing of importance in their lives. Moreover, just as Agassi desperately wanted to leave the tennis court as his father pushed him harder and harder, Coakley’s interviews with young ‘burnt-out’ athletes draw attention to how time, money, and effort are *invested on* children to the extent that they may continue to train and compete simply to avoid the sense that they might be “wasting an opportunity” or seem ungrateful for the actions of parents and coaches.

In his assessment of how young chronically-stressed athletes are “guided” (back) into a pattern of achieving performance goals (the very patterns which cause their initial distress), Coakley (ibid, p.283) is highly critical of stress management techniques of sports scientists and sports psychologists, accusing them of being guilty of “psychodoping,”⁸ which he describes as consisting of “*using psychological techniques to help adjust to conditions of dependency and powerlessness, and to discourage them from asking critical questions about why they participate in sport and how sport participation is tied to the rest of their lives.*” Examples of psychodoping, in line with the prevailing performance ideology, might include the promotion of *mental toughness* in athletes, a (pseudo)concept considered to be important for success and dominance in elite sport (c.f. Caddick and Ryall, 2012, for a useful discussion of the romantic value that sports practitioners bestow on mental toughness, and how it might be recognised as morally problematic, or as Caddick and Ryall write, as a *fascistoid ideology*). More recently, some scholars (e.g. Friedman and Robbins, 2012) have also been critical of how ‘positive-psychology’ (what some also call psychodoping), in a narrow and unbalanced cooption of humanistic psychology, can decontextualise human resiliency

⁸ Coakley (1992) notes that his use of the phrase “psychodoping” is inspired by a critique of sport science by John Hoberman (1986) in which Hoberman discusses “the science of performance and the dehumanization of sport,” and refers to sports psychology as “psychic engineering.”

from everyday social and environmental circumstances, that is, human action driven by a presumed value-neutral positive-psychology stance, however well-intentioned, ignores the complexity of social circumstances, and thus *may* lead to unanticipated negative consequences.

Carr and Batlle (in press) are similarly critical of the 'abuse' of psychology in the sport industry for the betterment of athletes' performance, suggesting that positive psychology may even have the (unintended?) effect of suppressing empathy among athletes. To combat the detachment of psychological knowledge from its practical (ab)use, Carr and Batlle (ibid) call for the development of a critical consciousness among practitioners and academics alike in the field of (sport) psychology. From this perspective, Coakley's (1992, p.284) scathing assessment of the impact of a discourse of performance in sport is worth noting. He writes:

As sport scientists compete for research funding and as they present their expertise to the sport community, it has become increasingly clear to me that, for the most part, they are doing little to promote recognition of athletes as human beings rather than performance machines...Unless the knowledge generated by sport science critically informs decisions about how sport is organized and ultimately ends up in the hands of athletes who are prepared to critically assess it and apply it to their own lives, sport scientists will be nothing more than technicians pandering to the interests of whomever has the resources to hire them.

To this end, taking the perspective of elite, organised, competitive, commercial (professional) sports as a social practice organised for the purpose of producing individual performance outcomes rather than opportunities for overall social development and critical self-assessment of how sport participation is tied to the rest of the lives of young athletes (c.f. Coakley, 1992), some scholars (e.g. Carr and Batlle, in press; Coakley, 2011) have suggested that the culture of professional sport, its values and ideals (situated in an ideological *neoliberal* framework of individualism and competition) represent an exemplary microcosm of neoliberalism-in-action.

2.4 ELITE, ORGANISED, COMPETITIVE SPORT AS NEOLIBERAL SOCIAL PRACTICE

Critcher (1988, p.206) has noted that "Sport is what it has been made to be." Recognising multiple influences on the development of modern sport, various scholars

(e.g. Coakley, 2011; Critcher, 1988; Dunning and Curry, 2004; Heller, 2008; Keech, 2003; Mangan, 1981; Parker and Watson, 2014; Polley, 1998) have discussed the historical development of sport in England as being intimately interwoven by/with political, economic, cultural, and social processes in a complex corporate-religious-masculine interface. Of particular note in the context of this section, is Coakley's (2011, p.69) observation in the introduction to his paper *Ideology doesn't just happen*, that the rise of neoliberalism in modern Western cultures has occurred at the same time as the growth in popularity of sports. Coakley highlights two concepts which require further discussion: ideology and neoliberalism. I attempt a brief engagement with both as part of the broader aim of this chapter to build a picture of the wider economic, political, cultural and social context within which boys take part in football academies.

Borrowing from and reworking the ideas of multiple scholars (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Elias, 1970; Hall, 1988), while also drawing on Gramscian-Marxist interpretations (c.f. Gramsci, 1971), I utilise an understanding of *ideology* as a complex and interwoven web of *dominant* ideas and beliefs arising from (and simultaneously encouraging) a particular patterning of society, which guides human beings in their everyday social lives, injects meaning into their actions and experiences, and (consciously/subconsciously/unconsciously) helps them make sense of and evaluate their (inter)dependencies and connections with others. Essentially, then, an ideology is a dominant and taken-for-granted (i.e. 'common-sense') way of thinking about, organising and evaluating the world in which we live.

Rather than trace a detailed path of how citizens in contemporary Western cultures have adapted to and come to adopt a particular ideological perspective known currently as *neoliberalism* (a discussion beyond the parameters of this thesis), I point the reader instead in the direction of others (e.g. Carr and Battle, in press; Coakley, 2011; Giroux, 2003ab; Turner, 2007) who have helpfully negotiated such a task already. Essentially, these authors describe neoliberalism as an organising principle, and as the push of agenda toward infinite competitiveness.

Drawing on Coakley's (2011, p.70-74) definitions and analysis, neoliberalism can be conceptualised through four statements: (i) Neoliberalism is an "economic doctrine" in

that (a) free markets and capital, safeguarded by corporate and political elites, are believed to drive social progress, such that (b) economic “success” becomes a marker of individual merit and social worth; (ii) Neoliberalism is a “political project” which emphasises the removal of all obstacles to economic success (i.e. the accumulation of capital); that is, (a) the deregulation of (inter)national markets, (b) the reduction of state power, (c) the privatization of public sector programs, and (d) the elimination of unions and activist communities, so that the global flow of capital becomes unrestricted, public services can be sold for profit, and human “collectives” cannot interfere in this process; (iii) Neoliberalism is a “cultural perspective” in that (a) social progress and solutions to social problems are perceived to hinge on individuals’ abilities to exploit the “free” market for their own self-interest, (b) “big government” (i.e. state regulation) is a barrier to social progress since it restricts individuals’ economic market-potential, and (c) when individuals’ fail in the economic market this is perceived to indicate a weak, careless, or lazy character; and (iv) Neoliberalism is a “framework for organising social relationships” in which (a) the logic of the free market is taken to be the optimal basis for organising human life, (b) competition and competitive reward structures are emphasised as the only fair way to allocate rewards, (c) efficiency (and thus progress) requires hierarchical organisation, and (d) inequalities in wealth are inevitable outcomes of human progress and development.

For some (e.g. Brown, 2003), a critical distinction between neoliberalism and capitalism would be that the ideological force of neoliberalism is one that not only restructures markets and economies (capitalism), but also the way that human lives are organised and (self-)regulated; that is, human subjectivities. Brown (2003, p.7) recognises this when she writes that:

Neo-liberal rationality, while foregrounding the market, is not only or even focused on the economy; rather it involves *extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action*, even as the market itself remains a distinctive player.

In short, this is the crux of my interest in ‘neoliberalism’ as a way of contextualising my own research on youth academy footballers. As social critic Henry Giroux (2011, p.335) points out, today’s market-driven value system and survival-of-the-fittest ethic “encourages a culture of competitiveness and produces a theatre of cruelty” which,

he argues, ultimately limits young people's growth as human beings. Understanding the wider macro-economic, political, and cultural 'neoliberalisation' of society is therefore vital in understanding why professional football academies function the way they do; that is, as Stratton et al. (2004, p.201) have noted, as mechanisms to "develop players for the first team or (at least) generate income through the sale of "marketable assets". In short, they have (potential) market value.

This is a perspective taken by a number of academics who have explored neoliberalism and sport. Indeed, for a number of academics (e.g. Coakley, 2011; Crawford, 2004; Giulianotti, 2002; Polley, 1998; Silk, Francombe-Webb, and Andrews, 2014), sport in contemporary Western societies must be discussed in terms of its increasing commodification (e.g. the increased involvement of big business, and the increased importance/influence of mass media). Others (e.g. Gruneau and Whitson, 1993, p.252) have pointed to the capacity of some sports⁹ to "blur the lines between 'community interests' and the interests of private capital." In this sense, Giulianotti (2002, p.29) has suggested that sport has undergone a rapid commercialisation and commodification, what he calls *hypercommodification*:

...this hypercommodification has been driven by the extraordinary and different volumes of capital that have entered the game [association football] from entirely new sources: satellite and pay-per view television networks, Internet and telecommunications corporations, transnational sports equipment manufacturers, public relations companies, and the major stock markets through the sale of club equity.

Accordingly, Coakley's (2011) explication of *neoliberalism*, as (a) an economic doctrine, (b) a political project, (c) a cultural perspective, and (d) a social-organisational framework, becomes increasingly relevant to any discussion of "sports organized as spectacle," that is, elite, organised, competitive, commercial sporting contexts. As Coakley (2011) outlines, *neoliberalism*:

...appears to be most compatible with sports organized as spectacle and represented to establish (a) the use of competitive reward structures to allocate rewards, (b) the use of market values to determine merit, (c) a focus on the individual and individual responsibility, (d) the belief that capital drives all forms

⁹ Gruneau and Whitson (1993) focused on Canadian ice hockey, but to me their characterisation of commercialism in ice hockey is equally applicable to broader conceptions of sport.

of progress, and (e) popular acceptance of inequality and hierarchical organization as fundamental to all forms of social relationships.

Within this conceptualisation of neoliberalism, Coakley (2011) provides a clear explication of sports as an embedded cultural practice, deeply interwoven in wider struggles with neoliberal values and ideals. In contemporary Western cultures, however, a unique form of elite, organised, competitive, commercial sport (EOCCS) has emerged and become dominant, a *hyper-neoliberalised* form that has been used by corporate organisations (e.g. big business and media) to promote, extend, and reinforce their own power and economic wealth. Coakley (2011, p.75) argues that big corporate sponsors can position themselves through sport as “ideological outposts in people’s heads” through which messages supportive of neoliberal policies can be delivered. According to Coakley (2011), these processes extend and reproduce capital, power, and influence for those who already control them, gradually blurring the lines in public consciousness between what best serves the people and what capital(ism) wants (see also Scherer and Jackson, 2010).

Further highlighting the neoliberalisation of competitive sport, Gerrard (1999) has noted that, as well as the widespread corporate sponsorship of mega-events and teams, financial institutions and media corporations have now begun to *acquire* sports teams in order to control broadcasting rights and signals, thus deepening further the integration between the sport industry and neoliberal free-market logic. This is just one more example of how elite, organised, competitive, commercial sports can be conceptualised as neoliberal, since the ways in which sports function are tightly interwoven with a web of corporate, commercial, capital interests, while also inextricably linked with a variety of social and cultural developments. In short, sport has and continues to be guided by capital interests. Commenting on the professional football industry, Dubai (2010, p.125) remarks that in recent years there has been an increasing ratcheting-up “of market-driven ideals that have pushed profit-making to the forefront of the global game.”

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have sought to make a case for thinking about contemporary elite, organised, competitive, commercial (professional) sport as a mechanism or

manifestation of neoliberalism at the global level (c.f. Coakley, 2011). I have identified youth elite sports academies (such as West-Side academy) as examples of neoliberal social practice: and reiterate Stratton et al.'s (2004, p.201) formulation of sports academies as existing to produce "marketable assets." I have also recognised the importance of friendships and peer-relationships in shaping broader mental health and well-being, and I have discussed some of the potential costs of competitive sport to the psychological, social, and emotional well-being of young people, including the potential for competitive sport to inhibit emotional-intimacy and positive friendship qualities. As Ommundsen (2005) has noted, for example, competitive sporting environments may encourage boys to think of each other as rivals, dampening intimacy and closeness and increasing the likelihood of conflict. Moreover, focusing on athletes at the elite levels of sport, I have discussed the potential for competitive sport to undermine and compromise functions of psycho-social well-being.

My intention in this chapter has been to develop my understanding of the macro-processes of 'neoliberalism' and of sport as a form of 'neoliberal practice' (c.f Coakley, 2011). As Parker and Watson (2014, p.72) point out:

Sport does not exist in a social vacuum. Rather, it evolves and develops in accordance with a variety of cultural and historical practices whilst at the same time embedding itself further into the fabric of everyday life. Modern-day sport has been (and continues to be) shaped and formed in line with the turbulence of social and cultural existence.

My engagement with the concept of neoliberalism has provided a useful way of thinking about how personal thoughts, actions, problems, and 'failings' are often connected to wider social issues, yet often ignored. By exploring the inner workings of 'neoliberalism', it may be possible to understand how the social, emotional, and psychological 'squeeze' that many individuals experience is in many ways a result of politico-corporate policy decisions that are made outside of their control. With this understanding, that neoliberal values and contemporary sport are interconnected, and that youth football players in professional football academies are subject to a macro-economic structure (the global football industry) that operates in accordance within competitive, free market economy (i.e. neoliberal) principles, I turn my attention to a discussion of another central organising principle in Western cultures and in Western

sport: gender. Specifically, I highlight the relationships between gender, youth, and sport, and the development of (boyhood) masculinities.

CHAPTER 3: GENDER, SPORT, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOYHOOD MASCULINITIES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

During the 1970s and 1980s, early scholars in what were then the relatively new fields of sports and masculinities studies, such as D. Stanley Eitzen (1975), Donald Sabo (1985), and Michael Messner (1987, 1990, 1992) all observed that, traditionally, *all* boys (even those who may lose interest in, be rejected by, or alienated from organised sports) are, to some extent, judged on their sporting ability, or lack of ability. As these scholars observed, organised competitive sports have traditionally represented a powerful component of Western cultures, particularly for boys and men. In this chapter, developing on the above ideas, I outline what Messner (1990, p.125) has previously called the “gendered” and “gendering” ‘nature’ of sports, focusing on sports’ ‘traditional’ relationship with masculinity and the way in which sport and masculinity permeate the early development and everyday life-experiences of boys and men.

However, having established this *traditional* account of sporting masculinities and gender-relations, I also take into account a growing body of *contemporary* scholarship, which suggests that the landscape of contemporary masculinities is changing rapidly toward more progressive and ‘inclusive’ forms (c.f. Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010; Adams, 2011; Anderson and Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson 2012; Anderson, 2005; 2008; 2009; 2011; 2014; Anderson and McCormack, 2015; Anderson, McCormack and Lee, 2012; Bush, Anderson and Carr, 2012; Campbell et al., 2011; Cleland, 2013; 2014; Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Kian and Anderson, 2009; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2013). In doing so, my intention is to better understand the life-worlds of boys growing up in contemporary Western culture, boys like those in my own research who have become embroiled in the youth academy levels of the professional football industry.

3.2 ‘TRADITIONAL’ PERSPECTIVES ON MASCULINITIES AND SPORT

Twenty five years ago, Messner (1990, p.121), reworking Craib (1987), suggested that organised sports could be thought of as providing a safe-haven for boys to “seek nonintimate attachment with others within a context that maintains clear boundaries,

distance, and separation.” Within this context, Messner (1990, p.120) noted that when the men he interviewed in the late 1980s spoke of playing sports in their childhood because “it’s just what everybody did,” what they tended to mean was, that it was just what *boys* did. As Messner (ibid) wrote, boys at that time were:

...introduced to organized sports by older brothers and fathers, and once involved, found themselves playing within an exclusively male world. Though the separate (and unequal) gendered worlds of boys and girls came to appear as “natural,” they were in fact socially constructed.

Later, Messner (2000) recounted a moment in his oldest son’s life (in the early 1980s) that highlights both the “polluting” effect of femininity in the lives of boys at that time, as well as highlighting the power of peer relations in (re)constructing gender identity. Messner (ibid, p.777) writes:

When he was about three, following a fun day of play with the five-year-old girl next door, he enthusiastically asked me to buy him a Barbie [doll] like hers. He was gleeful when I took him to the store and bought him one. When we arrived home, his feet had barely hit the pavement getting out of the car before an eight-year-old boy laughed at and ridiculed him: “A *Barbie*? Don’t you know that Barbie is a *girl’s toy*?” No amount of parental intervention could counter this devastating peer-induced injunction against boys’ playing with Barbie.

The accounts from Messner (1990, 2000) above provide a brief glimpse at how masculinities (both in and out of the sport context) have traditionally been constructed. In the first part of this chapter, I explore the forms of masculinities that have been dominant in sport throughout the 20th Century and into the early 21st Century. My intention here is to understand the role that sport has played in the construction of gendered identities.

3.2.1 THE GENDERED AND GENDERING ‘NATURE’ OF TRADITIONAL SPORT FORMS

Organized sport is a “gendered institution” – an institution constructed by gender relations. As such, its structure and values (rules, formal organization, sex composition, etc.) reflect dominant conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Organized sport is also a “gendering institution” – an institution that helps to construct the current gender order.

(Messner, 1990, p.125)

In developing my thinking in the field of gender, masculinities and sport, the work of sociologist Douglas Hartmann (2003) has been particularly useful. Recognising the powerful cultural meanings that are attached to not just playing sport, but the way sports are played, Hartmann notes that when boys engage in sports there is an *expectation* that they will ‘naturally’ play with intensity and aggression, and that if boys fail to perform this way then they somehow fail at ‘being boys’. Importantly, as Hartmann (ibid) points out, challenging conventional boys-will-be-boys perspectives, the intensity and aggression with which parents, peers, teachers, and coaches encourage *boys* to play in youth sports, make it hard to argue that the phenomenon of gendered differences in sport is physiologically or biologically induced. This reflects what Messner (1990) points out in the opening statement to this section: that sport has been a “gendering” institution. Developing this idea further, Hartmann (2003, p.16) writes that the behaviours and attitudes that are traditionally valued in sport by boys and their parents, peers, teachers, and coaches, are not just about sport, but (significantly) about masculinity more generally:

The inherent connection of sports to the body, physical activity and material results, the emphasis on the merit of competing and winning, the attention to rules, sportsmanship and team play, on the one hand, and gamesmanship, outcomes and risk, on the other, are not just defining aspects of male youth sport culture, but conform to what many men (and women) believe is the essence and value of masculinity.

Moreover, Hartmann’s (2003) analysis of masculinity and sport suggests that political, cultural, and social manipulation of sports is specifically reflective of *men*’s obsession with sports.

3.2.2 A MALE OBSESSION: POSITIONING GENDER WITHIN A MODERN SPORT NEXUS¹⁰

As alluded to in the introduction to this chapter, in the development of contemporary gender and sexuality politics, the institution of sport has been suggested as playing a

¹⁰ The “sport-media complex” is a term first introduced by media scholar Sut Jhally (1984) to describe a self-reinforcing monetary and commercial loop between sport and the mass media. Michael Messner and colleagues (e.g. Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt, 2000) have also developed upon this concept to account for the corporate commercial interface of sport, in what they have called the “sport-media-commercial complex”. Here, I also acknowledge the work of Varda Burstyn (1999) who discusses these multiple political, corporate, cultural, and social “complexes” as constituting an interwoven web of sport, or “Sport Nexus.”

central role in the social learning (and teaching) of boys and men (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Hartmann, 2003; Messner, 1990). Many researchers (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Connell, 1995; Fine, 1987; Hargreaves, 1987; Klein, 1993; Messner, 1990; Messner and Sabo, 1994; Walker, 1988; White, Young, and Mcteer, 1995) have previously suggested that sports are closely connected to the (re)construction and reconstruction of particular types of masculinities; in other words, that sport seems to be influential in the processes of *gendering*.

Equally, some scholars (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1994; Messner, 1992, 2002; Pronger, 1990) have argued that sport has promoted a conservative form of masculinity, and this is claimed to be particularly the case with men's teamsports. Indeed, when it comes to the most extreme expressions of anti-femininity and misogyny in Western cultures, Messner (2002) points to a media-complex saturated with stories about the misconduct of *male athletes*; including their on-the-field deviance, brawling in bars and nightclubs, gang rapes (perpetrated against women), and verbal and physical abuse of girlfriends and spouses. The common perception of the men who commit these violent acts, notes Messner (2002), is that they are deviants; that they have strayed from the norms of proper behaviour on their athletic teams and in their schools. However, as Messner explains (2002, p.203), such off-the-field group 'deviance' is a 'normal' by-product of male athletes' strong interpersonal bonding and we should therefore not be surprised by these stories of male athletes' violence. Offering further evidence to this effect, Kraeger's (2007) study of the link between male adolescent violence and sport participation (in which he surveyed over 90,000 American adolescents in grades 7-12) finds that sports (in particular contact sports) are "positively associated with male serious fighting" (p.719). Importantly, findings from research such as this problematise the notion that sports are a useful mechanism for keeping kids 'out-of-trouble' or that sports are a useful way of teaching children to control their aggression.

In addition, and further evidencing the entrenched "gendered" aspect of sports and the (hyper)masculine interests of the sports-media-commercial complex/sport nexus (c.f. Burstyn, 1999; Messner, Dunbar, and Hunt, 2000), more sports journalists are men

(97%) than women (3%)¹¹ (also see Lapchick, 2008, who observes that 94% of sports editors, 89% of assistant sports editors, 88% of columnists, and 87% of sport reporters in the United States are male), and while female attendance at major sporting events appears to be increasing, a brief flick through the TV coverage of major sporting events will attest to the fact that these spaces remain dominated by male fans (for example, female fans at English Premier League fixtures in the 2005-2006 season were reported as 14.6% of the total attendances¹²). These statistics documenting men's intense commitment to and integration into the world of sport are multiple and various. In short, while girls and women *can* play, watch, and write about sports, they arguably can only *ever* do so on men's terms – since it is men who have constructed the current (elite, competitive, commercial-focused) sport-media nexus within which women carve out their sporting opportunities and sporting lives.

In this politically, economically, culturally, and socially-divided (gender-segregated) sport-nexus, matters are complicated even further by gender stereotypes related to particular forms of sport, cultural *beliefs* about what men and women can learn from particular sports, and by the economic value of particular sports, such that both men and women are seemingly *guided* into sport in different ways and for varying (political, economic, social, cultural, historical, and ideological) reasons. Below, I begin to unpick some of these *guiding* forces that have ushered-in and steered the development of sport as a *male* obsession, and as *the* male obsession of the late 20th Century and early 21st Century, that is, as Hartmann (2003) writes, why men love sports.

3.2.3 MEN'S LOVE OF SPORTS

In an article titled *The Sanctity of Sunday Football: Why Men Love Sports*, sociologist Douglas Hartmann (2003) raises some interesting questions about men's obsession with organised, competitive sport. He points out that when asked why men are so fanatical about sport, most people will say that sports are a "good thing," since without them men would have to vent their natural aggression in other ways in other parts of their lives, not something society wants. As Hartmann writes (*ibid*, p.14):

¹¹ The Guardian: 'Men still dominate national newspaper journalism'. Available online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2011/mar/04/women-national-newspapers>

¹² Thompson, J. (2006). 'Female fans: a (more) beautiful game.' Sunday 29 October 2006 in *The Independent*. Available online at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/female-fans-a-more-beautiful-game-422102.html>

When asked why so many men are so obsessed with sports, most people – regardless of their gender or their attitudes about sports – say something to the effect that men are naturally physical and competitive, and that sports simply provide an outlet for these inherently masculine traits. To sociologists, however, men love playing, watching, and talking sports because modern, Western sports – dominated as they are by men and by values and behaviours that are traditionally regarded as masculine – provide a unique place for men to think about and develop their masculinity, to make themselves men, or at least one specific kind of man.

Here, Hartmann suggests that the idea that men are more naturally physical and competitive is the popular discourse underpinning men's obsession with sport. However, Hartmann (*ibid*) is critical of these reasons for explaining men's valorisation of sport and in explaining men's higher participation rates compared to women's. He suggests that the reasons men give for their sporting fanaticism (i.e. sport is fun and exciting, sport is relaxing, sport keeps men physically fit) fail to explain men's *historical domination* of sporting spaces and the ways in which men's success in sport can materialise into benefits for men outside of sport. Hartmann's comments inspire and underpin some of the key themes of this chapter in which I try to unpick some of the processes behind men's obsession with sports in Western cultures, namely; (i) how and why sport became a *gendered* institution (i.e. a device for separating men from women, and girls from boys, and maintaining male social domination) and, (ii) the role sport plays in *gendering* those embroiled in it (i.e. in teaching boys/men how to be "real" men, and "separating the men from the boys").

In moving towards a more detailed discussion of why sport might be considered as a male obsession, my hope is to explore further some of the political, cultural, social and ideological understandings of "what sport means" with regard to gender relations, that is, "what sport means to men" in Western societies. This requires some discussion (despite sport more recently becoming what some feminist scholars describe as a "contested terrain" of gender relations and ideologies – e.g. Messner, 1988), of how and why organized sport originally emerged to serve a (faltering) masculine ideology of superiority at a time of masculine-crisis in the late-nineteenth Century, how historical understandings about gender and sexuality have shaped childhood play, games, and

sport, and how, in turn, these historical and ideological components of Western cultures have shaped current human relationships with sport.

3.2.3.1 'A MAN'S GAME': SPORT AS HISTORICALLY GENDERED

From the turn of the 20th Century, when (competitive, organized team) sports, such as association football and rugby, first emerged in Anglo-American societies, as a concomitant of a long and complex process of industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization (the birth of the modern market society), they rapidly gained cultural recognition as a valued leisurely pastime among men. Some scholars (e.g. Carter, 2006; Rigauer, 1981) have suggested that organized games and sports (particularly in schools) played a central role in socializing into boys the qualities required in a capitalist economy; namely being docile to authority. However, as Burstyn (1999) also alludes to, any rounded understanding of how sport has evolved the way it has, requires an understanding of the gendered social order and the rights/rites of men, that is, the power and privilege of men within that social order. Perhaps nowhere is this link between modern sports and male domination more explicit, than in the vision of Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, whom, Fischer-Lichte (2005, p.72) notes, sought to re-establish the bond between “modern individuals – among whom he counted only men, not women.” In fact, as Brown (2012, p.154-155) points out, de Coubertin, raised in an aristocratic environment, opposed women competing in the Games, “contradicting his Olympic goal of ‘a sports for all’”: de Coubertin (cited in Mitchell, 1977, p.214) stated that:

...the Olympic Games represents the solid period of manifestation of male sports based on internationalism, on loyalty as a means, on arts as a background and the applause of women as a recompense.

As Krüger (1997) highlights, de Coubertin supported many campaigns to suppress women competing in the Games, and while he yielded to organizing committees to allow women to participate, he still opposed women's participation until his death in 1937.

While historically-grounded understandings of sport as embedded in economic/political (capitalist) relations are an important consideration for any theoretical and empirical work on sport, therefore, American sociologist Michael Messner (1988) reminds us that

any understanding of how modern organized sports have developed to become so popular in the public consciousness of Western society must pay attention to the historical and ideological meanings of sport in relation to the politics of *gender* relations. In this respect, as Messner writes (1988, p.198), gender is centrally important to understanding sport as a dynamic social space, that is, how “organized sports have come to serve as a primary institutional means for bolstering a challenged and faltering ideology of [white-middle class] male superiority in the 20th Century.”

From such a critical gender perspective, Messner (1988, 1992) has discussed how sports came to be regarded as an effective way of separating femininity and masculinity – to this end, sports have functioned as an “arena of struggle” over what it means to be a man/woman since the turn of the 20th Century and have become an important tool in combating cultural concerns about the threat of male feminization. Other scholars (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Connell, 1995; Pronger, 1990) have also noted compellingly that sports have played an important role in promoting and maintaining men’s subordination of women during the 20th Century.

Indeed, the rapid development of organized sport “for the masses” that accompanied the industrialization of British society at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century represented a way of integrating and rationalizing the increasing leisure time of the growing working class into an expanding capitalist economy. However, as Messner (1988) notes, this explanation of the growth of modern sport is limited in its ability to understand the meaning of sport within a system of gender stratification and male domination. Thus, in line with the thinking of Messner (*ibid*) and others (e.g. Burstyn, 1999; Connell, 1995; Pronger, 1990), the historiography of sport and industrial capitalism can be reworked somewhat to produce a more gender-nuanced account of the development of modern organized sport; an account in which sport can (i) be recognized as having been created and maintained as a “separate and unequal” sphere of life which served/serves as a tool of male domination, to bolster male power and privilege through the exclusion of women and girls, and (ii) be understood as emerging as a measure of manliness, amid fears of male “feminization” during multiple “crises” of masculinity, from the late 19th Century through the 20th Century, up to today.

3.2.3.2 SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL: THE ORIGINS OF SPORT AS A TOOL OF MALE DOMINATION

According to Cancian (1990), prior to the industrialization of Britain during the late 19th Century and early 20th Century, men and women predominantly shared a domestic sphere that was forged around an agrarian economy in which men worked in their own businesses and farms, and controlled the financial power of the family. As Cancian (ibid) notes, with industrialization, separate public and domestic spheres were reinforced as *men's* (public) and *women's* (private), thus creating a new basis for male power and privilege. Messner (1988, p.200) notes that, as ownership of property and business was slowly eroded and wage labour became more prevalent during this time, and fewer families (men) owned their own businesses or farms or controlled their own labour (the *means of production*), male privilege based on control of financial resources and the ability to *provide* for the family (i.e. the breadwinner role) could no longer be guaranteed.

During this time, as Cancian (1990) and Lopata (1994) have suggested, mass urbanization in search of more stable forms of (wage) labour, and the subsequent migration of women away from the domestic arena during the industrial revolution and Wartime periods, resulted in encroachments on traditionally male public-sphere activities. Some scholars (e.g. Filene, 1975; Hantover, 1978; Wilkinson, 1984) have also observed that emerging fears of social-feminization led men to retreat toward a preoccupation with concepts such as physicality, toughness, and “true” manliness. Moreover, Messner (1988, p.200) notes that, “within this context, organized sports became increasingly important as a ‘primary masculinity-validating experience’” (c.f. Dubbert, 1979, p.164). Significantly, as Messner (1988, p.200) points out, any understanding of how gender interacts with organized sports in today’s world must acknowledge that:

[Modern] Sport was a male-created homosocial cultural sphere that provided men with psychological separation from the perceived feminization of society while also providing dramatic symbolic proof of the “natural superiority” of men over women.

In this cultural moment, the utility of sports proved particularly useful as one way of justifying men’s right to social dominance. Primarily, as R.W. Connell (1995) suggests,

sports could achieve this in two ways; (i) by structurally excluding women (male domination), and; (ii) by embedding elements of competition and hierarchy among men (“separating the men from the boys”). “Men’s greater sporting prowess,” notes Connell (1995, p.54), became “a theme of backlash against feminism...symbolic proof of [men’s] superiority and right to rule.”

In other words, the formal exclusion of women (and gay men) from participation in sport appears to have been fundamental to sports’ capacity in justifying men’s dominance over women. This has been noted by both Bryson (1987) and Burton-Nelson (1994), who have suggested that if the bodies of women and gay men were also allowed to crash and collide on the sports field, then heterosexual men’s claims to patriarchal and heterosexual privilege would be weakened. This sentiment, recognising modern sports’ origins and historical development as a tool of male domination and privilege, is perhaps captured most succinctly and eloquently by Mariah Burton-Nelson (1994), who suggests that, *The Stronger Women Get, The More Men Love Football*.

3.2.3.3 SEPARATING THE MEN FROM THE BOYS: SPORT AS HISTORICALLY GENDERING

To be manly in sports, traditionally, means to be competitive, successful, dominating, aggressive, stoical, goal-directed and physically strong.
(Messner and Sabo, 1994, p.38)

Importantly, the historical structuring and development of modern sport has not only served as a tool to ‘prove’ men’s dominance over women and gay men. It is equally key to appreciate how sport throughout the 20th century traditionally privileged certain subsets of heterosexual men and functioned to order them into a masculine hierarchy; in other words, to function as a measure of manliness that “separates the men from the boys.” This embedding of *competition* and *hierarchy* among men is the second way, as noted by Connell (1995, p.54) and Messner and Sabo (1994, p.38), by which men “control” sport. This ordering process is what is described in Connell’s (1987, 1992, 1995) theory of *hegemonic masculinity*; something I discuss in more detail in CHAPTER FOUR. At this point, it is sufficient to note that hegemonic masculinity theory suggests that multiple forms of masculinity (i.e. *masculinities*) are socially constructed, esteemed, marginalized, and subordinated, and that (in addition to *inter-gender domination*, that is men’s domination of women) social practices of *intra-masculine*

domination and marginalization (i.e. men's domination of other men) function to regulate the gendered behaviours of *all* men, as a *whole* gender-class, not just those at the 'bottom of the pile.'

Significantly, therefore, boyhood (and 'being a man') in Western societies has not been simply about being (physically and spatially) separate(d) from girls, it has meant defining one's 'self' in relation/opposition to other boys and 'femininities.' Put differently, what this means is that being a 'real' boy has tended to mean not being 'girly' and not being 'gay.' Explicating these links in the context of playground football-narratives and relations in an English primary school, Renold (2000, p.11) notes that:

...those boys that scored goals or saved goals or displayed mastery of skill in the game were often considered by the others as more masculine through their various achievements...To signify their achievement and subsequent competence in the game, the boys...reiterated to their friends throughout each day, how many goals they had scored and saved, or the quality of their sporting actions. Thus, at the core of the hegemonic masculine ideal...were continuous physical displays of skill, aggression and strength...the boys in the study were constantly struggling to attain and negotiate this ideal. Those most in threat of failing to display their 'masculinity' however...seemed to re-negotiate their sense of masculinity through the exclusion and subordination of femininities...

Jon Swain (e.g. 2006) has also conducted ethnographic work highlighting the role of sport in constructing boys' masculinities. Swain notes (ibid, p.330) that boys in his study were "classified and divided by their physicality," meaning that the construction of meaningful (masculine) identities became centralised around particularly active and energetic "high status" sports such as football and rugby: in these games "it was the boys who were the most accomplished players who were the most popular." As one boy in Swain's study (p.328) comments, to get on with people at school: "you've got to be quite good [at sport], OK, and not muck up everything all the time."

Elsewhere, Swain (2000, p.105) has also pointed out that, during games of playground football, subordinate groups of boys "were largely ignored, hardly got a kick of the ball, and were frequently publicly derided and ridiculed for their lack of skill and prowess." Swain observed that these boys were feminised by the dominant boys and subjected to remarks such as "Gaylord," "Poofter," and "Why don't you go and play with the Brownies." As Thorne (1993, p.134) suggests, even in elementary school, the

gendered lines of separation and inequality, between what boys and girls *can* and *can't* do, are visible: ready to be “consolidate[d] as kids enter adolescence and the institution of heterosexuality.

During the late 20th Century, therefore, traditional perceptions of gender norms dictated that male youths should take care not to cross boundaries into ‘femininity’. Within these parameters, a commonly-held assumption was that femininity and athleticism were incompatible, meaning that female athletes became linked with being lesbian and effeminate male athletes became linked with being gay. Thus, as Lipsyte (1979, p.17) pointed out, in a culture and gender belief system that traditionally conflated athleticism with masculinity, there existed a sexist rationalisation of women’s competence in sport that can simply be put as this: “A woman can’t beat a man unless he’s a fag or she’s not really a woman.” Moreover, encapsulating the function of homophobia during the 1980s, Michael Messner (1992, p.36) writes that the homophobic “banter” and sexually objectifying talk of boys:

.....together act as a glue that solidifies the male peer group as separate from females, while at the same time establishing and clarifying hierarchical relations within the male peer group. In short, homophobia polices the boundaries of narrow cultural definitions of masculinity and keeps boys – especially those in all-male environments such as organized sport – from getting too close. Through sport, a young boy learns that it is risky – psychologically as well as physically – to become too emotionally open with peers: he might be labeled a “sissy,” a “fag,” or even be beaten up or ostracized from the group.

In summary, the institution of sport in the 20th century and early 21st Century has been influential in cultivating, (re)producing, and maintaining particular forms of gender – that is, in “gendering” sports. My intention in this section has been to highlight how sport has traditionally served two fundamental purposes with regard to gender-relations: firstly, to separate *between* genders (inter-gender domination), that is, men from women, and boys from girls, and secondly; to separate *within* genders (intra-gender domination), i.e. the “men from the boys,” and the soft/weak/“feminine” men from the hard/tough/“masculine” men. This is the traditional perspective on sport and masculinities. Before reviewing what the contemporary literature on sport and masculinities has to say, I briefly examine the traditional organisational structure of youth sports in Western cultures.

3.2.4 THE ADULT-MALE ORGANISATION OF YOUTH SPORTS IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The youngest boys, about eight years old (who could barely reach the basket with their shots) played a brief scrimmage. Afterwards, the coaches line them in a row in front of the older boys who were sitting in the grandstands. One by one, the coach would stand behind each boy, put his hand on the boy's head (much in the manner of a priestly benediction), and the older boys in the stands would applaud and cheer, louder or softer, depending on how well or poorly the young boy was judged to have performed. The two or three boys who were clearly the exceptional players looked confident that they would receive the praise they were due. Most of the boys, though, had expressions ranging from puzzlement to thinly disguised terror on their faces as they awaited the judgements of the older boys. (Messner, 1990, p.121)

In the excerpt above, Messner (1990, p.121) captures the competitive structure of sport in the late 20th Century and the potential impact that adult intervention in the organisation and control of sport can have on the self-worth of young people. Analysing this cultural moment further, Messner (1990, p.121) suggested that such experiences may have taught boys that it was not “just about being out there with the guys – being friends” that secured the attention they craved and the connection with others that they desired. Instead, as Messner (1990, p.121) wrote: “It is being *better* than the other guys – *beating* them – that is the key to acceptance.” At the dawn of the 21st Century, Burstyn (1999, p.27) summarised the ‘problem’ of sport in similar fashion:

The problem – if the myriad difficulties of modern sport can be connected in one phrase – is that sport also divides people in ways that are often destructive and antisocial. Sport divides people against themselves. It separates children from children, men from women, men from men, and community from community. And it does this most centrally through its inflection of gender, particularly its offering of ideal types and behaviours for men.

Sport, therefore, has traditionally played a structured role in the lives of boys. Sport has served to bring some boys and men together, but at the same time it has served to separate them from girls and women: a process of sex-segregation which embedded certain men in the realm of sport early on in their lives, at the same time that it excluded women. In short, sport is structured such that it creates ‘us’ and ‘them’ relationship between participants and opponents. In this regard, Hartmann (2003) captures boys’ relationship with sport when he notes that not all boys play sports, and not all boys who play sports experience them positively. Throughout the 1990s, this was clearly

evidenced by Sabo and colleagues (Messner and Sabo, 1994; Sabo, 1998; Sabo and Panepinto, 1990) who suggested that boys' early experiences of organised games and sports are, in fact, quite negative, often filled with painful and violent experiences of physical injury and/or emotional pain. According to Fine (1987) it was the way that *adults* organised and controlled youth sport which led to such costs and consequences for young people themselves.

In his exploration of American male preadolescent culture and Little League baseball, Fine (1987) observed that youth sports tend to be organised around the assumption that children's involvement in sports requires firm guidance from adults (that is, predominantly adult men). Fine (*ibid*, p.15) notes that: "although preadolescent sportsmen are not mere pawns strategically moved by their coaches, their behaviours are significantly constrained by adult desires." In this sense, as Fine (*ibid*) explains, youth sports are "structured by the demands and claims of adults." Fine (*ibid*, p.15) writes that:

Organised sport is not merely activity; it is situated activity. Indeed, most if not all human activity requires resources to permit it to occur properly. The more "organized" an activity, the more resources are required to bring it off.

While Fine conducted his research in the USA in the 1980s, his critique of the organisation of youth sport by adults remains valid and relevant when thinking about organised sports in England today, too. Importantly, as Fine highlights, the resources (e.g. personnel and finances) required to "bring off" organised sports are typically gathered and controlled by adults, while the children that "play" these games/sports have little influence over how resources are used. In other words, adults (as, for example, committee members, parents/audiences, match officials, and coaches) determine which children will play on which team, how organisational "problems" will be solved, and how money will be spent. As Fine (1987, p.15) writes:

In no league did players (or even ex-players) have a representative. No one was charged to speak for the boys. In each league it was assumed (no doubt correctly) that adults had the interests of the boys at heart, and further, it was assumed the adults and boys would have the same perspectives on what should be done, and when they didn't the adults were correct.

Furthermore, Fine (1987) reveals that adults' control over the structure of youth sports positions adult coaches in the role of interpreter and enforcer of the rules, leaving little room for the interpretations of children themselves as to how the games should be played and negotiated. However, as Fine (ibid, p.27) writes, the role of adults in organised youth sports of this kind are not inevitable, and could be organised differently:

One justification given by the Little League organization for adult involvement is to teach the fundamentals of baseball. Were this the only motivation for involvement, an adult presence could have been maintained with the preadolescents themselves organizing the game. However, this is impractical as the game is currently structured. Adults cannot stand the diffuse organization of children's games (Devereux, 1976), which break off, continue, and become reorganized. Whether this is because children are not able to maintain attention or because they have different standards of organization is not an issue.

On this matter, Fine (ibid, p.27) adds that youth sports organised primarily by children have not developed because they would simply make adults feel awkward and powerless. He writes: "The adults would be less powerful than the preadolescent players, requiring a role reversal for preadolescents and adults unique in contemporary American society." The final consideration which Fine (ibid) points out as being important to understanding the role of adults in the organisation and *control* of youth sports, and he notes, perhaps youth sports' most important function in the eyes of adults, is the premise that youth sports build character. As Fine (1987, p.27) suggests:

...this goal assumes that adults have moral as well as technical expertise. When adults structure play, interpret rules and umpires' decisions, and motivate their young charges to perform properly, the idea of a Little League game as a moral event can be sustained.

In summary, Fine's analysis of adults' organisation of youth sports suggests that adults, particularly as coaches and parent-audiences, constantly tread a fine line between over-involvement, under-involvement, technical coaching of skills, and the development of character skills. In doing so, Fine notes that adults are often caught between extremes in organising children's behaviour. On the one hand, over-involvement can lead to criticisms that they have forgotten that youth sports are *just a game*, and that winning and losing do not "really matter." Put simply, it may "look bad"

when coaches become too involved. On the other hand, under-involvement (“letting players organise themselves without a clear mandate to do so – often with chaos resulting” – Fine, 1987, p.30) can lead to criticisms of not having control and not disciplining players effectively. Fine’s (ibid, p.31) observations are revealing of how perceived under-involvement in the disciplining of children and the teaching of technical skills are central features of the adult coaches role. As Fine (ibid) points out:

His responsibility is to teach players to perform well and skilfully. He must be concerned that his players publicly display baseball skills and character attributes in an appropriate manner.

While coaches in his study were routinely criticised for either *not being strict enough*, or *being too strict*, Fine (ibid) notes that the primary role of coaches was to teach the game of baseball, and not holding practices or teaching technical skills enough, or well enough (or at least, not being seen to teach by parents) basically means that a coach is perceived by others as having failed at their role. As one Little League mother told Fine (ibid, p.32):

I liked [the coaches] personally very much. I did not feel they had enough actual coaching as far as skills. It seemed it was easy to miss a practice...Like when they would make an error they were really nice to the kids; they were very quick to say “That’s all right. That’s all right.” Whereas some of us parents felt the kids should have been corrected right there. You made a mistake, next time do it this way. Because I don’t feel they learned enough (parents interview, Bolton Park)

Although the complexity of the game of baseball, for example when compared to the relatively simple constraints and fluidity of the game of association football (soccer), means that Fine’s analysis might not apply as rigidly to other forms of organised youth sport, he provides some valuable insights into the interweaving of adult and youth involvements in organised games and sports in contemporary Western cultures.

In summary of Fine’s (1987) analysis, he suggests that the in-built formality in the structure of youth sports (i.e. rules, coaching, purpose-built fields) and the high levels of adult organisation required to deliver youth sports, therefore, undermines the rhetoric of children’s sports being about ‘play’ and instead suggests that adults (particularly men) play a significant role in both *making possible* and simultaneously

constraining the parameters of boys' early experiences of games and sport, both technically and morally – or, as Fine puts it (1987, p.40), it is adults who determine not only how children's games *can* be played but also how they *must* be played – as organised, competitive sports.

3.3 'CONTEMPORARY' PERSPECTIVES ON MASCULINITIES AND SPORT

"Despite decades of overt homophobia," Anderson (2009) writes, "there are a number of cultural trends related to sexuality and gender that may influence how boys and men are reconstructing their own and other's sexual and gendered identities." According to Anderson (2009), perhaps the most salient trend in this reconstruction of masculinities has been the rapid decline in cultural homophobia, particularly among young males. Increasingly, research is documenting a growing impression of acceptance of homosexuality and softening of masculinities in wider Western culture (e.g. Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2012; Anderson, 2005, 2009, 2010; Anderson, Adams and Rivers, 2012; Anderson and McCormack, 2015; Baunach, 2012; Becker, 2012ab; Campbell et al., 2011; Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Cleland, 2013; 2014; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Cowan, 2007; Jarvis, 2015; Keleher and Smith, 2012; Kian and Anderson, 2009; Loftus, 2001; Michael, 2013; McCormack, 2010; 2011; 2012; 2014; McCormack and Anderson, 2010; Morrison, Speakman and Ryan, 2009; Park and Rhead, 2013; Roper and Halloran, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005; Southall, Anderson, Nagel, Polite and Southall, 2009; Stotzer, 2009; Taulke-Johnson, 2008; Weeks, 2007).

3.3.1 DECREASED HOMOPHOBIA, INCREASED INCLUSIVITY

Becker (2012b, p.1011), commenting on a 2010 report published by the PEW Research Center in America, notes that: "On the whole, it seems that attitudes toward family status and composition are shifting toward a more neutral or tolerant outlook, similar to the shifts seen in attitudes toward civil or same-sex legal unions." Moreover, Brewer (2008) has documented increasing support for gay and lesbian adoption rights since the early 1990s; from around 20 percent to around 50 percent. The research of Brewer (2008) and Becker (2012b), among others (Baunach, 2011; Becker and Scheufele, 2011; Keleher and Smith, 2012), indicates an increasing liberalization of attitudes toward gay civil rights issues. Becker and Scheufele (2011), for example, note that such changes in attitude may be due to generational change, while Baunach,

Burgess, and Muse (2010) suggest that attitudes may be changing as a result of the increased prevalence of gay and lesbian couples raising children in one's own social network or community. Importantly, as Becker (2012b, p.1026) highlights, increasingly diverse social networks and increasing social contact with gay and lesbian people - paired with an increasingly liberal young electorate - means that "it is possible that a fundamental shift in public opinion toward the same-sex marriage debate may already be underway." Summarising their results about changes over time in the USA, Keleher and Smith (2012, p.1323) note that: "Younger more tolerant people were becoming adults, while older, less tolerant people were dying." They conclude (ibid, p.1324): "We are witnessing a sweeping change in attitudes toward lesbian and gay men." Still, despite increasing acceptance of homosexuality, Dickter (2012, p.1127) notes that, "individuals may be unlikely to confront an individual who makes an anti-gay comment, for fear of retaliation or out of concern that confrontation would not make a difference." Interestingly, Dickter (2012) found that those heterosexual individuals who did confront those who made anti-gay remarks, felt more satisfied with their own behaviour than those who did not confront other's anti-gay comments, suggesting a potential benefit to standing up against sexual prejudice.

In the UK, the British Social Attitudes 30 report edited by Park, Bryson, Clery, Curtice and Phillips (2013, p.viii), notes that since the 1980s attitudes towards the roles of men and women have changed "considerably." Moreover, in the same report Park et al. (2013, p.viii) highlight a growing "tolerance" of same-sex relationships, as they note:

Perhaps the most dramatic attitude shift of all relates to the way in which Britain thinks about same-sex relationships. In 1983, half the public (50 per cent) said that 'sexual relations between two adults of the same sex' were 'always wrong', a figure that rose to nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) over the subsequent four years, in the wake of the discovery of AIDS and its much-publicised linkage with male homosexual activity in the particular.

Today, however, as the British Social Attitudes 30 report highlights (2013, p.ix), such attitudes now seem to be a world away: "Now these proportions are more or less reversed; only around one in five (22 per cent) think that same-sex relations are 'always wrong' while nearly half (47 per cent) say they are 'not wrong at all'". Further highlighting the changing social landscape of the 21st Century, 83 per cent of the

British public think it is acceptable for gay men and lesbians to teach in schools (43 per cent in 1983), 90 per cent feel comfortable with gay men and lesbians holding a position in public life, and 56 per cent agree that “gay men or lesbian couples should have the right to marry one another if they want to” (Park et al., 2013, p.ix). While 56 per cent might seem low to some, it is a considerable change from 1983, when 87 per cent of the British public opposed the idea of ‘gay adoption,’ and as recently as 2007, only 47 per cent supported ‘equal marriage.’ Equally, it is worth noting that homosexuality was only made legal in 1967. According to Park et al., (2013, p.ix) the statistics on ‘gender roles’ and homosexuality represent a “dramatic change in attitudes” among the British population, in which each successive generation since 1983 has had more liberal views than its predecessors. In their section on *Personal Relationships* in the British Social Attitudes 30 report, Park and Rhead (2013, p.18) offer a more in-depth analysis of the data; noting that there are some important details in this data which require highlighting. For example, Park and Rhead (2013, note that a person’s education is closely tied to their attitudes towards homosexuality, with university graduates most tolerant (19 per cent in 2012 thought homosexuality always or mostly wrong) and those without qualifications being least tolerant (nearly half, 47 per cent, in 2012 thought homosexuality was wrong). Still, both figures are down by almost half from their 1985 rates; 39 per cent of graduates and 78 per cent of those without qualifications. Indeed, across most issues of personal relationship (e.g. marriage, parenthood, homosexuality, abortion, premarital sex) there have been huge shifts in attitudes among Britons. As Park and Rhead (2013, p.24) conclude: “...as older generations die out and are replaced by more liberal subsequent generations, society’s view as a whole becomes more liberal.” Adding further weight to the suggestion that Britain has become increasingly liberalized in recent years with regard to opinions toward homosexuality and gay rights, Clements and Field (2014, p.523) highlight the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 as a “milestone in gay rights in Britain,” and an indicator of how progressive Britain has become for gay people.

Consistent with the above data on attitudes towards homosexuality, Savin-Williams (2005) has suggested that sexuality is of decreasing importance as a defining characteristic of individuals’ identities. In this vein, Stotzer (2009, p.76) has found that college-aged participants largely expressed an attitude that sexuality was “no big deal”.

Among the important influences that contributed to participants' attitudes to sexuality, Stotzer (2009), like Altmeyer (2001) before her, found that participants cited their families, particularly their parents, not necessarily through direct conversations but more so indirectly through the examples that these family members set through their actions. Of course, not all parents are tolerant or supportive of LGBT identities, thus parenting is not the only means by which youth today develop their positive identities. Increasingly, an exposure to non-heterosexuals before exploring their own or their peers' sexual orientations or identities is also documented as an important factor in positively influencing young people's attitudes toward homosexuality and bisexuality (Anderson, 2010; Herek and Capitanio, 1996; Morrison, Speakman, and Ryan, 2009; Roper and Halloran, 2007; Stotzer, 2009).

Furthermore, in contrast to the almost universally reported narratives of anti-gay victimization and harassment in academic literature, Taulke-Johnson's (2008) small-scale qualitative study highlights the relative homophobia-free lives of university students at a UK university. Taulke-Johnson's findings, based on a sample of six gay male undergraduate students, challenge the 'victim' narrative with which gay students are often defined, instead acknowledging positive non-victimised accounts and providing a richer understanding of the lived experiences of gay university students in the UK.

A growing atmosphere of support toward non-heterosexuality is also found among sixth form boys in the UK. McCormack and Anderson (2010) identify the existence of pro-gay attitudes and an elimination of homophobic language in this setting. Although McCormack and Anderson's (2010) research reports that heteronormativity remains, they suggest that the inclusivity observed and reported by the boys in their study permitted a transgression of once-strictly defined heteromasculine boundaries. McCormack and Anderson (2010) suggest that this allowed the boys to relate in more physically and emotionally intimate ways without fearing homosexualisation by their peers. Importantly, McCormack and Anderson (2010) note, the boys in their study were not just tolerant or quietly supportive, but were *active* allies who vocally expressed their support of their non-heterosexual or non-heteromasculine peers. McCormack and Anderson's (2010) work therefore documents how in some settings decreasing

homophobia has led to an increase in the social legitimacy of alternative categories of sexuality and has positively shaped and expanded the socio-political terrain for gay males.

For university students, there also exists a culture where many students avoid romantic relationships. Instead, undergraduates frequently engage in casual sex, something they call hooking up (Bogle, 2008; Stepp, 2007). These trends have been suggested to increase the viability of alternative categories of sexuality, expand social and political landscapes for sexual minorities, and to reduce the disparity between acceptable gendered behaviours or at least create more space for the open discussion of behaviours traditionally coded as non-heteromasculine (Anderson, 2005, 2008; Barnett and Thomson, 1996; Loftus, 2001; Tanenbaum, 1999; Wolf, 1997).

As reductions in cultural homophobia/homophobia occur, a cultural space is opened for the recognition of sexualities and/or sexual behaviours that have been previously silenced and stigmatized. For example, Anderson's (2009, 2008a,b,c) studies of heterosexual male athletes find them to display positive attitudes toward homosexuality, to value homosocial emotional intimacy, as well as homosocial physical tactility. The one-time rule has also been challenged by some male youth in sports settings. Among a sample of heterosexual university men in the UK, same-sex kissing was constituted as compatible with a heterosexual identity, particularly among those who were affiliated to university sport teams (Anderson, Adams, and Rivers, 2010). Other research by Adams and Anderson (2010) found that, among university-aged soccer-playing men in the U.S., perceptions of sexual identity and sexual behavior are complex; these men do not intellectually challenge the idea that one same-sex experience forever renders one in the identity category of homosexual.

3.3.2 DECREASED HOMOPHOBIA AND CHANGES IN SPORTING MASCULINITIES

In this regard, the early 21st Century has seen a rapidly growing body of literature examining heterosexual men in sport and their increasingly progressive attitudes toward homosexuality (e.g. Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2012; Anderson 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Cleland, 2013; 2014; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Harris and Clayton 2007; Magrath, Anderson and

Roberts, 2013; Price and Parker 2003; Southall et al. 2009). For example, Southall et al. (2009) surveyed competitive teamsport athletes in the deep American South and found that only 22% expressed any reservation with having a gay male sharing sporting spaces with them. In these studies, heterosexual male athletes are found to display acceptance toward homosexuality, a central tenet of what Anderson (2009) calls *inclusive masculinity*. In this regard, Anderson (2009) suggests that the myths and misattributions regarding sexuality may be relegated to a particularly conservative period of American and British history, and that youths' attitudes toward sex and sexuality are changing—and they are changing rapidly.

Evidencing such a change, specifically the increasing value of emotional and physical intimacy among heterosexual male athletes, Schrack-Walters, O'Donnell, and Wardlow's (2009) qualitative analysis of men's participation in athletics suggests that the development of communal and emotional effects is becoming increasingly more important between men on sports teams and finds that comments from athletes were laden with emotional intimacy. And, encouragingly, when they heard men express very high levels of affection for each other, "none of the athletes qualified their statements using a heterosexual standard of acceptability" (Schrack-Walters et al., 2009, p.92). The ability of athletes "to include other, more "feminine" parts of their identities without being labelled a "fag"" is something Pascoe, 2003, p.1427) calls "Jock insurance".

The findings of Schrack-Walters et al (2009) contrast to those of Pascoe (2003) among teenage high school boys in the US; for some boys Pascoe suggests that athleticism functions as 'Jock insurance' while other less masculine boys were found to rework meanings of gendered identity to include masculinised attributes associated with the most dominantly masculine of the schools peer groups – the Jocks. Pascoe (2003) found that non-Jock boys who were understood as less masculine within the school's hierarchy could create or maintain a sense of self as masculine by associating with 'Jock attributes'. In other words, athletes can draw on their athleticism to insure themselves against homosexual suspicion when they deviate from gender norms, whereas "when athleticism is not an option for boys, they draw on other masculine traits associated with the Jock, such as emphasized heterosexuality or dominance, to "make up for" what they lack in claims on masculinity through sports" (p.1427-1428).

Research by McCormack and colleagues (McCormack, 2011; 2012; 2014; McCormack and Anderson, 2010) is also interesting in this context, since it contrasts traditional findings of homophobia among young men (c.f. Nayak and Kehily, 1996). For example, McCormack and Anderson (2010) note that among 16-18 year old male students in an English co-educational sixth-form college, homophobia was thought of as not acceptable behaviour. McCormack and Anderson (2010, p.855) also found an “absence of overt homophobia” among heterosexual boys, and an ability of these same boys to “associate with gay students, to be physically tactile and emotionally intimate with other boys, and to discuss once-feminized topics without recourse to homophobic discourse; all without being homosexualized for their behaviours.” In another paper, utilising evidence from the same school setting as discussed by McCormack and Anderson (2010), McCormack (2011, p.91) has also highlights how “sporty boys” in his study setting, Standard High, would contest the homophobia of their peers.

Other research on (inclusive) masculinities in sporting contexts has found more liberal views toward masculinity and (homo)sexuality (e.g. Adams, 2011; Adams et al., 2010; Anderson 2009; Anderson and McCormack, 2015; Anderson and McGuire, 2010; Bush, Anderson, and Carr, 2012). Moreover, research by Cleland and colleagues also suggests that liberalised attitudes toward homosexuality exist among football fans in England (Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Cleland, 2013) and in the English print media when representing homosexuality (Cleland, 2014). Media analyses of other sports settings have also found a lack of homophobia and inclusive visions of masculinity. In a study of online media narratives around Mixed-Martial Arts (MMA), Channon and Matthews (2015, p.950), for example, found “inclusive discourse within MMA media”; a significant finding they suggest “given the previous theorization that combat sport exist primarily as heterosexist ‘male preserves’”.

In a professional football club academy setting, Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (2013, p.2) found that 16-18 year old players on the team they interviewed from maintained “inclusive perspectives on homosexuality, whether they maintain contact with gay men or not”. Magrath et al.’s findings that “the vast majority of players expressed deep-seated inclusive attitudes,” are important, because they disrupt understandings of

homophobia among elite-level soccer players. While the players in Magrath et al.'s study are not current top-level professional players, they have the potential to be in future years. The documentation of such progressive attitudes toward homosexuality among the (prospective) next generation of British football players is a unique finding, something I have concurrently been exploring through my own research as presented in the findings chapters of this thesis.

Importantly, the findings of researchers such as Anderson (2009; 2014), Cleland (2013; 2014), Channon and Matthews (2015), Magrath et al., (2013) and Schrack-Walters et al., (2009), suggest that representing male athletes in the 21st Century as monolithic 'jock' individuals may now be an inaccurate representation of the experiences and gendered identities of all male athletes. Indeed, this has been recognised by Bush et al., (2012, p.16) who have suggested that "it is no longer sociologically responsible to generalize all sports, and all men who play them as homophobia. Increasingly, it appears to be the opposite."

The reasons for this cultural shift are multiple and varied. And although decreased homophobia and homophobia come via many media, political, and other influential cultural factors, McCann, Minichello and Plummer (2009) suggest that among the numerous ways social attitudes toward homosexuality are enhanced is social contact with sexual minorities. They show that when the homosexuality of a friend is revealed, homophobic men are forced to quickly re-evaluate their impressions of someone they had previously viewed positively. In other words, once they understand that a friend is gay, they experience an "awakening of new ideas" which challenges their preconceptions of homosexuality (McCann et al. 2009, 211). This finding is something that Anderson (2005) retrospectively accounts for concerning gay athletes.

Pettigrew (2008) further identifies the importance of contact in reducing prejudice between heterosexuals and homosexuals. He shows that knowing a gay male helps reduce heterosexual prejudice, but that maintaining the ability to speak to him about sex provides a further reduction in personal homophobia. Indeed, in recent research, Anderson and Adams (2010) report how teammates react positively to an openly gay researcher and the coming out of one of their own players. Countering media myths

that gay men in ostensibly heterosexual male institutions will damage the social cohesion of that group, Anderson and Adams found evidence to the contrary, opposing the suggestion that having a gay teammate was detrimental to the performances of the team. Indeed, while in the field, the researchers observed these men progress further through their competition than they had ever progressed before. Furthermore, in 2005, Anderson documented how declining cultural homophobia helped influence openly gay athletes to come out to their high school and university teams. Here, they were able to use their sexual non-conformity to further contest orthodox masculinity.

3.3.3 THE CHANGING SOCIAL LANDSCAPE OF PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL

Even in the short period in which my own research has been conducted, much has changed in professional sport, and particularly the world of professional football. At the time of interviews there were no openly gay male professional footballers in England, but on the 15th February 2013 a young American international soccer player based in England came out. However, on the same day that Robbie Rogers, 25, announced his coming out he also announced his retirement from professional football:

For the past 25 years I have been afraid, afraid to show whom I really was because of fear. Fear that judgment and rejection would hold me back from my dreams and aspirations. Fear that my loved ones would be farthest away from me if they knew my secret. Fear that my secret would get in the way of my dreams...Now is my time to step away. It's time to discover myself away from football.

The English Football Association (The FA) immediately reached out to offer its support to Rogers, saying they would support him regardless of whether he decided to continue his professional football career or not. In the UK, the reaction to Robbie Rogers' coming out appeared positive (see BBC Sport, 15 Feb 2013). In the United States, many of Rogers' former teammates also showed their support. Major League Soccer (MLS) commissioner Don Garber also advocated Rogers' decision and praised his courage. A video message from US soccer club Seattle Sounders published on YouTube (Feb 15, 2013) was followed by other messages of support. At another US MLS club, the Philadelphia Union, their captain, Brian Carroll, a former teammate of Rogers' at Columbus Crew offered words of admiration for his former colleague, saying "I have nothing but the utmost respect for Robbie and I wish him all the best in all he does."

He called it a “complete non-issue” and added, “I would love to have him on my team...I would welcome him back with open arms.” Philadelphia Union kicked off their 2013 season in March, and a Union fan group showed their support for Rogers by holding up signs reading “RR” and holding a minute’s silence during the 18th minute of the game to honour the former No.18 player.

Rogers quickly showed signs of reversing his decision to retire. In an interview with *The Guardian* newspaper (29th March 2013), Rogers said: “I might ask [head coach] Bruce Arena if I can train with [MLS team] the LA Galaxy – we’ll see.” At that time, Rogers was also being lined up by MLS club Chicago Fire. On the 17th April 2013, although Rogers had made no formal approach to LA Galaxy about training with them, (LA Galaxy head coach) Bruce Arena responded: “He’d always be welcome to train with us.”

Early in May 2013, Rogers began training with the LA Galaxy. This proved to be a stepping stone toward fully reintegrating himself into the world of professional football, when on 25th May 2013 it was announced that he had signed a “multi-year” contract with the Galaxy. New teammate Landon Donovan (US Men’s national team all-time leader in scoring and assists, most caps of current active players, and highest scoring American player in FIFA World Cup history) summed up the event when asked about his club’s most recent acquisition:

“Everybody wants it to go a certain way on the field, but in my opinion it’s already a success. Whether he plays one minute or a thousand minutes or ten thousand minutes, it’s already a big step in the right direction for our society as a whole.”

That Sunday night to a standing ovation from the crowd, just over three months after coming out and retiring from professional football, Robbie Rogers stepped out under the lights of his former club in Seattle and came on to the field as a substitute for LA Galaxy to mark a milestone in the history of gay footballers.

In an interview in *The Guardian* newspaper in December of that same year (Fifield, 2013), Rogers reflected on his experience of coming out and making a return to professional football in the US. “The whole year’s been absolutely insane,” he noted,

“Nothing I’d expected has happened. Most of what I feared hasn’t happened either. It’s been quite the opposite, with nothing but support and love from friends, team-mates, family.”

3.3.4 CONTEXTUALISING MASCULINITIES AND HOMOPHOBIA IN 21ST CENTURY SPORT

In 2010, on a men’s football team in England, I found (Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010) a wider range and a greater appreciation of clothing styles among young men. Similarly, my findings (Adams, 2011) on a U.S. university-based soccer team suggest a subversion of the rigid boundaries of gendered assessment that has traditionally existed among male team sport athletes. Today, these men can wear a whole variety of patterns and colours without ridicule, and without their bond to other men on their team being threatened. These findings, while by no means universal, are suggestive of a potential change in the ways that young athletes today are ‘doing’ masculinity - even extending to their choices of personal sportswear, for example, some even wear pink football boots (c.f. Adams, 2011). The men I refer to above do masculinity and engage emotionally and physically in ways that, in Curry’s (1991) locker room, would have been considered highly deviant. Findings such as these make sense when considered alongside the developments and rapidly progressive social change taking place at the top levels of professional sport.

In this respect, the example of David Beckham provides an interesting point of discussion with regard to ‘metrosexuality’ and the emergence of more inclusive tenets of masculinity in UK sport culture. As Clayton and Harris (2009) have noted, in 1998, when English football icon Beckham was photographed and pilloried in the tabloid newspapers for wearing a sarong, the intention was to emasculate him; this was in much the same way as another professional footballer of the generation previous to Beckham, Graeme Le Saux (Le Saux, 2008) was homosexualised by his teammates and opponents for the way he dressed, the way he spoke, and even for the newspapers he read. Beckham’s story illuminates further the changing nature of masculinity in the UK when read in contrast to that of Graeme Le Saux, who, although being heterosexual, suffered much homophobia during his football career. Commenting on the trajectory of David Beckham’s masculinity post-sarong, Clayton and Harris (2009, p.132) write that: “In the decade that followed, emasculation turned to detestation, back

to emasculation and to acclamation and imitation, in what appeared to be the dawn of a transformation of male footballing identity.” Beckham’s performance of a new incarnation of ‘metrosexual’ masculinity contrasted the strong traditional sense of working-class masculinity that threads its way through Le Saux’s (2008) account, and the forms of masculinity which have been acknowledged by Parker (2001), for example, as deeply associated with modern football culture in the UK. Clayton and Harris (2009, p.136) highlight a change in media perspectives around Beckham, noting that after the earlier efforts of the media to subvert Beckham’s ‘doing’ of a divergent form of masculinity and to re-emphasise traditional ‘retro’ forms of masculinity, the media changed their narrative: as Clayton and Harris (ibid) note, this was exemplified by the *Sun*’s (2003, August 30) discussion of David Beckham as “the perfect role model for every generation...a glamorous handsome fashion icon.”

While Le Saux was a football player of some acclaim, was well known in the UK, and had represented England at international level, Beckham’s level of skill and his famous ability to score free-kicks, his good looks, and his celebrity marriage to Posh Spice made him one of the most famous sportsmen in the world and therefore one of the most familiar faces on the planet; perhaps it is this blend factors that made it possible for him to subvert and redefine traditional gender roles without emasculation or fear of homosexualisation. Perhaps Le Saux was simply not famous enough to affect the culture that weighed so heavily upon him, or perhaps his career had simply begun a decade early. Le Saux (2008) remarks that upon returning in 1997 to Chelsea Football Club where he first began his professional career in 1987, the dressing room culture he experienced was markedly different. Le Saux remarks that it was beginning to align with his own way of doing masculinity; something he credits as being influenced by the influx of ‘foreign stars’ during the mid-nineties. As Le Saux writes (2008, p.189-190):

All the venom had gone...it was much more inclusive...it was a gentler place than it had been. I felt that for the first time as though football was beginning to move towards me. Suddenly, now that the culture of the game was changing and becoming more cosmopolitan, I fitted in.

Something had changed in the time that Le Saux had been away from Chelsea. The way that Le Saux describes his personal experiences, framed a decade apart, is

indicative of wider cultural declines in homophobia in recent years. Perhaps guided by public figures such as David Beckham, and football players such as Freddie Ljungberg who embraced their progressive 'metrosexual' and 'gay icon' status (c.f. Coad, 2008), men have been described in sociological literature (e.g. Anderson, 2009) as rapidly reconfiguring their own notions of masculinity, and how they perform these newly emerging masculinities. Indeed, the growing body of literature I have previously discussed suggests a rejection of once-central tenets of masculinity, such as homophobia (c.f. Anderson, 2005; 2009; 2014; Anderson and McGuire, 2010; McCormack and Anderson, 2010; Stotzer, 2009; Schrack-Walters et al., 2009; Southall et al., 2009; Taulke-Johnson, 2008).

As I have noted in previously discussed literature, contemporary masculinities and social attitudes toward homosexuality and gay rights have markedly changed since the 1980s. Even during the short period in which my own PhD research has been conducted, much has changed about the social landscape of sport. Upon beginning this PhD there were no openly gay male professional footballers in England. That remains the case, although there have been a number of athletes who have come out in this time, including two amateur footballers in Sweden (Anton Hysen) and England (Liam Davis), and one professional footballer in England (Robbie Rogers) who retired immediately after coming out but is now playing professional soccer in the U.S. Moreover, across a variety of sports in both Britain and America, there have been a number of other high profile athletes who have come out in the past few years and remained active in their sports, as well as a number of heterosexual male athletes who have publicly expressed their support for their gay colleagues.

3.3.5 GAY ATHLETES, COMING OUT, AND STRAIGHT-ALLIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Justin Fashanu was the first openly gay professional footballer in England. As a black, gay man in the 1980s, Fashanu's experience of coming out and playing professional football was defined by a mixture of racism and homophobia. In 1998, after a long decline from being one of English football's fastest-rising stars, Fashanu took his own life in a deserted lock-up garage in Shoreditch, London. Ten years after Justin Fashanu's death, the Justin Campaign was formed to raise awareness of his life and the continuing issues of homophobia in football. Prior to this, the Gay Football

Supporters' Network (GFSN) was founded in 1989 to promote the support and participation of gay men and women in football, and act as a medium for LGBT football supporters to be united in challenging homophobia.

As I touched upon above, the story of Graeme Le Saux is another frequently commented example of homophobia in football. In his extensive career as a professional football player which began (1987) around the time that Fashanu came out (1990), Le Saux endured many years being singled out by opposition fans and players as the target of homophobic abuse. Le Saux's heterosexual marriage and family offered no protection from this 14-year onslaught of abuse and, in his autobiography *Left Field*, he spoke out about the impact the abuse had on his playing career and personal life. Diverging from the narrow traditional identity of how footballing masculinity should be 'done', Le Saux enjoyed reading, dressing well, frequenting coffee shops, and going to art galleries, and did not endorse the 'laddish' drinking and sexually-objectifying culture of his teammates. This positioned him as an easy target of others' discrimination, and his personal interests became clues about his sexuality. By the homophobic logic of his peers, it followed that since he was not like them there was something 'wrong' with him; that he must be gay. Le Saux wrote in his autobiography, "Even though I have never been gay...I became the leading victim of English football's last taboo" (2008, p.1). The homophobic taunting left him feeling "like a bullied kid on his way into school to face his tormentors", isolated among his teammates, deeply depressed, and ultimately close to walking away from football (p.30).

In contrast to 'metrosexual' figures such as David Beckham (c.f. Coad, 2008; Clayton and Harris, 2009), Le Saux's story in a pre-metrosexual age is a telling account of how homophobic abuse can lead boys and men to distance themselves physically and emotionally from one another. The homophobic taunts from his teammates started when he took a camping trip through Europe with a Dutch teammate. Le Saux concedes that the constant teasing and ridicule about his sexuality, and about him being an item with this teammate drove the two friends to drift apart and stop being friends. The abuse gradually intensified, both from opposition players "yelling abuse at me, spitting 'faggot' and 'queer' at me," and from the fans who would sing 'Le Saux

takes it up the arse' wherever he played (Le Saux, 2008, p.xiii) or shout abuse from the sidelines, "Their faces would be contorted with aggression and they'd be screaming this homophobic abuse at me that was often really vicious stuff" (Le Saux, 2008, p.9).

Probably the most infamous moment of Le Saux's career occurred in 1999. During a game in front of 40,000 fans in the stadium and millions of TV viewers, Le Saux was fouled by his opponent from Liverpool Football Club, England international footballer Robbie Fowler. As Le Saux prepared to take the resulting free kick, Fowler was standing ten yards away:

The ball was in front of me, ready for the free-kick. I looked at Robbie. He started bending over and pointing his backside in my direction. He looked over his shoulder and started yelling at me. He was smirking. 'Come and give me one up the arse,' he said, 'come and give me one up the arse.' He said it three or four times...He [the official] could see what Robbie was doing but he didn't take any action...Everyone knew what Robbie's gesture meant...I asked the linesman what he was going to do about it. He just stood there...I told the linesman I wasn't going to take the free-kick until he [Robbie] stopped...I wish Paul Durkin [the referee] had found it in him to decide what was going on and then send Robbie off for ungentlemanly conduct. It was a big moment. What Robbie did provided a chance for people to confront a serious issue.

(Le Saux, 2008, p.18-19)

The issue was not confronted by the referee, and although Fowler was later given a two-match suspension by the Football Association (the governing body for football in England), the issue was clouded by another case in which Fowler made a mock-cocaine-snorting gesture during a goal celebration. In Le Saux's opinion, it got the Football Association 'off the hook' over confronting homophobia in football and demonstrated their ambivalence toward the issue compared to other standards of equality:

Robbie wouldn't dream of making gestures to a black player so why did he feel it was acceptable to incite me by sticking out his backside? I think football had a chance to make a stand there and then against this kind of thing. The game could have made a strong statement that such blatant homophobia would not

be tolerated...It could have been a turning point. But football didn't make a stand...No one wanted to deal with it (p.20).

Le Saux's account paints a picture of British professional football culture that is complimented by the social research of the time. Research by Parker (1996) highlighted football was a place where masculinity was predicated on domination and aggressives at all times, while Magee (1998, p.129) wrote of football, that players were taught to "look after themselves," through the use of physical aggression as well as verbal abuse and intimidation. In similar fashion, others have described football as a rife with abuse, intimidation and violence (Kelly and Waddington, 2006), a place where players are socialised into becoming 'hard, tough bastards' (Roderick, 2006a, p.36), and an occupational setting in which 'wind ups', insults and verbal chastisement, often sexually explicit and highly derogatory in nature, were highly-esteemed (Parker, 2006, p.396-397). In the context of this ruthless hyper-masculine culture, Robbie Fowler, presumably, like many football players do, was merely trying to exploit a known weakness of another player, to increase the pressure on Le Saux and make him 'snap' in the way that Parker (2006) describes. Undoubtedly, many closeted boys and men witnessed the Le Saux-Fowler incident waiting for football to make a stand against homophobia. When an incident of this nature is not dealt with appropriately, this sends the message to boys and men that it is acceptable behaviour.

With the launch of the *Kick Homophobia Out of Football* campaign in 2010, the sport of professional football is at an important juncture in its commitment to rid football of homophobic discrimination and inequality. Making it illegal to shout homophobic abuse from the terraces is a positive step. In 2009, for example, two Tottenham Hotspur supporters were found guilty of homophobically-abusing ex-Tottenham player Sol Campbell as he played against his former club. A 28-year old man and a 14-year old boy, captured on CCTV cameras were found guilty of shouting homophobic slurs at Campbell, and banned from attending football matches for three years (Daily Mail, 16 May 2009). With an assertive campaign having been conducted over the past decade to combat racism in football, it seems the issue of homophobia in football is fast becoming the focal point for social justice and equality campaigners.

Some support has been garnered from current high profile professional players and managers. On the kickitout.org website, ex-Portsmouth, Bristol City and England goalkeeper David James is attributed with this quotation; “If you’re gay, what’s the problem? We’ve got gay staff at Portsmouth and they carry on with their day’s work and no one really cares”. Also, in a recent BBC documentary about homophobia in sport, Clarke Carlisle of Burnley, who is an ambassador for the *Kick Homophobia Out of Football* scheme, was the only straight footballer to agree to talk on camera. Off-camera, Darren Purse, captain of Sheffield Wednesday Football Club, is another rare example of a professional footballer willing to speak on-record about challenging homophobia in football (McRae, 2010). And, while some cynics might say somewhat predictably, Brighton and Hove Albion manager Gus Poyet has offered his support for the campaign; A statement by Poyet on the Football Association website reads, “There is no place for abusive behaviour of any kind in football and it is totally unacceptable. The game is to be enjoyed by everyone, from all walks of life, regardless of age, race, background and sexual orientation” (thefa.com, Feb 2010). Moreover, in 2012, the English Football Association released a video showing a discussion on homophobia and the FA’s anti-homophobia plan between ex-professional footballers John Scales, Brendon Batson, and Adrian Williams. There are other signs that the landscape of professional footballer is changing. Interestingly, *The Secret Footballer*, an ex-professional footballer turned anonymous columnist for the Guardian newspaper, has suggested that a gay player would be accepted by other professionals, but that the major worry for any gay player would be the abuse they would get from the fans. However, this perception of homophobic fans is contested in research by Cashmore and Cleland (2012), who suggest that the vast majority of football fans in England (93%) would be supportive of a gay footballer coming out.

Elsewhere, Cleland (2014) has highlighted the positive media representation of amateur Swedish football player Anton Hysen’s coming out in 2011. In an interview in *The Guardian* newspaper (Barkham, 2011), Hysen himself has commented that: “Everyone has been very positive.” Hysen explains that his coaches, teammates, friends, and family have all been positive and supportive. As I have discussed earlier and as others have noted (c.f. Cleland, 2014), U.S. international footballer Robbie Rogers retired then came out in February 2013 to a positive reaction inspiring him to

rebuild his career in the US. Furthermore, following in the steps of former Germany international and Premier League footballer Thomas Hitzlsperger (the only gay footballer to have played in England's highest league), semi-professional footballer Liam Davis of Gainsborough Trinity F.C. also announced that he is gay.

While 31-year-old Hitzlsperger came out in January 2014 after retiring from the game, 23-year-old Davis (who came out a week later) became the only openly-gay amateur or professional player to be actively playing in the UK. Discussing his experience of coming out in the Lincolnshire Echo newspaper, Davis comments: "I was at Selby at the time I came out, playing very low down in the football league pyramid. I did not bring it up. Nobody sat down and spoke about it, nobody bothered with it, or took an interest in it." He adds: "After Selby I moved to Brigg. There was a lot more banter in the dressing room there. The lads knew and there were jokes, but at no point did it cross the line. There was nothing malicious ever said and it was a good place as there was a few of my old youth team mates from Grimsby there who knew me." When Davis joined Gainsborough in the summer of 2013, he says he was asked about his sexuality by a teammate on a night out: "He did it in a jokey way which broke the ice and that was good," notes Davis. "Some of them have known each other for years and the others that come in are made to feel welcome, nobody is made to feel an outcast." Interestingly, considering recent findings by Magrath, Roberts and Anderson (2013) who found that the 16-18 year old academy footballers in their study had progressive views about homosexuality and the hypothetical situation of having a gay teammate, Davis suggests that he did not come out when he a youth footballer because he did not think, at that time, that his peers' "knowledge and experience" was "as broad as others".

As well as in football, gay athletes have recently come out in a number of other sports, too. In December 2009, for example, the Welsh rugby union player, Gareth Thomas, came out. This made Thomas the first openly gay professional rugby player still playing in Britain. Describing the reception he got from his closest teammates, Thomas said: "...they came in, patted me on the back and said, 'We don't care. Why didn't you tell us before?' Two of my best mates in rugby didn't even blink an eyelid" (Walsh, 2009, p. 32). Interestingly, the press response to Thomas' coming out has been that Thomas'

homosexuality has been well received, but that everywhere else in sport is homophobic and would not be so welcoming to a player who decided to come out.

More recently, in 2011, England international Steven Davies became the first professional cricketer to come out as gay. In an interview in the *Telegraph* newspaper (Grice, 28 February 2011), Davies described the positive support he received from teammates, particularly captain Andrew Strauss and coach Andy Flower: “I owe them both a lot,” said Davies, “They were 100% behind me and made me feel everything would be alright. In fact, I felt I was probably making a big deal out of it.” At the next training session, notes Grice (2011), Davies’ teammates came over to him one by one to shake his hand and tell him he had done the right thing. Following the likes of Liam Davis, Robbie Rogers, Gareth Thomas, and Steven Davies who have come out while still playing their sport, have been NBA basketball player Jason Collins (in 2013), NFL American-football player Michael Sam (in 2014), English Rugby League player Keegan Hirst (in 2015), and American minor league baseball player David Denson (also in 2015). Keegan Hirst, the UK’s first openly gay rugby league player, hailed the ‘overwhelming support’ of fans and fellow players in the days following his coming out (c.f. BBC, 17 August 2015), while on the same day David Denson also described a positive coming out experience across the Atlantic (c.f. Grinberg, 17 August 2015): “Talking with my teammates,” he told reporters, “they gave me the confidence I needed, coming out to them.” Denson added:

They said, ‘You’re still our teammate. You’re still our brother. We kind of had an idea, but your sexuality has nothing to do with your ability. You’re still a ballplayer at the end of the day. We don’t treat you any different. We’ve got your back.’

Public support was also forthcoming from Denson’s teammates on the Milwaukee Brewers, including a statement released by the Brewers supporting Denson’s decision to come out, as well as a number of messages of support from teammates Troy Stokes, Mitch Gelfi, and Charles Galiano outlining their respect for him as a player and a person, their pride at having him as their teammate and highlighting their support for Denson (c.f. Grinberg, 17 August 2015). In short, since beginning my own PhD research, the landscape of gay athletes in professional sports across the UK and US

has changed substantially. In addition to gay athletes coming out, however, of sociological interest has been the reactions, thoughts, and responses of the teammates of gay athletes, and their fellow professionals.

Further to gay athletes coming out in the UK and US, more progressive attitudes toward homosexuality have also been publicised among heterosexual athletes in both countries. For example, the recent appearance by heterosexual England Cricketer James Anderson on the front cover of gay men's magazine *Attitude* is testament to this increasingly supportive attitude when it comes to homosexuality (Briggs, 22 Sep, 2010); "If there are any gay cricketers," Anderson told *Attitude*, "they should feel confident enough to come out, because I don't think there is homophobia in cricket". Anderson is not the only athlete to offer his support for gay athletes and to contest homophobia in sport. Indeed, a number of professional athletes who oppose homophobia and are advocates for their gay teammates and co-professionals have voiced their support in recent years. English rugby world cup winner Ben Cohen has been active in supporting LGBT rights, while NFL players Chris Kluwe, Dante Stallworth, and Brendon Ayanbadejo, MLB baseball player Justin Verlander, retired NHL ice hockey player Sean Avery, and NBA star Steve Nash, have been active in their support of same-sex marriage in the United States, while Australian rugby player David Pocock has recently stated that he will not marry until gay marriage is made legal in Australia. While American Footballer Chris Kluwe has voiced his concerns over the homophobic attitudes of some of his former coaches, hinting at a deeply ingrained homophobia in older generations of professional athletes and coaches, whole sports teams in the US have also voiced their support for gay rights, with a number having created videos supporting the *It Gets Better* campaign: including, the L.A. Dodgers, Philadelphia Phillies, Baltimore Orioles, Boston Red Sox, and the San Francisco Giants. Elsewhere in Europe, public support for gay footballers appears to be emerging, too. In August 2013, in Amsterdam, Holland, a number of former Dutch international players took part in a Gay Pride event, including Pierre Van Hooijdonk, Patrick Kluivert, Ronald de Boer, and Martijn Reuser. The Dutch FA, the KNVB, organised a boat to take part in the annual parade to take place along Amsterdam's canals. It represented the first time the Dutch FA had taken part. Included in the group

was now-Manchester United head coach, Louis Van Gaal, one of the most high profile soccer coaches in the world.

Among professional footballers in England, perhaps the most vocal supporter of gay rights has been former Queens Park Rangers player Joey Barton. In 2012, speaking on a TV documentary *Britain's Gay Footballers* presented by Justin Fashanu's niece, Amal Fashanu, Barton became the first professional footballer to speak openly on camera about gay footballers. In the documentary, Barton explains to Fashanu that one of his uncles is gay, and that this family experience has led him to think about how closeted gay men can feel isolated. Moreover, Barton predicts that a gay footballer will come out within the next ten years, and suggests that the primary obstacle to this happening is the "archaic figures" of managers and coaches in the game. Fashanu confides in Barton that "it has been really hard to talk to straight players about this issue," and Barton responds by saying:

I sort of pity them, that they don't have enough about them, or enough self-confidence or enough self-worth to be able to say 'you know what this is actually a relevant subject and this is my opinion on it' and I think it's important that the legacy this generation of players leaves is as a generation of players that not only changed the game for the better, and changed the teams that they played in, but also change the culture and change the society of the football clubs they played at.

On his website, Barton writes: "do I think there'd be an issue in the changing room if a player came out? I'd like to think not. I get that's not an objective answer, it's only from my experience. But I'm confident that my teammates would judge a player purely on his field ability, his skill and his character." Again, interestingly considering Cashmore and Cleland's (2012) findings that the vast majority of fans would be accepting of a gay footballer, Barton suggests that: "In the UK, I'd perhaps envisage some aggressive fans on occasion," although he notes that this would likely come through "Twitter abuse." A veteran Premier League footballer of over 300 top-flight games for Manchester City, Newcastle United and Queens Park Rangers, Barton's comments are not to be sniffed at: he represents a valuable insider-perspective into the locker room culture of one of the world's most closed social settings. As Barton writes: "I remain optimistic, and don't think we're a million miles from creating a positive football

culture, accepting of all diversity.” Concluding his post, Barton makes an important point, too, when he notes that:

It’s all well and good speaking about an idyllic culture, but how can we get it? The way I see it is simple, you’re not only responsible for what you say but what you don’t say. People with social impact need to speak up. I felt encouraged as I saw awareness raised during the Rainbow Laces campaign, but that was just one event. What we need is to make that awareness grow until homosexuality is accepted, by football and each person involved in it.

In 2014, Joey Barton teamed up with gay rights organisation Stonewall for a second year, to raise awareness of homophobia in football through their Rainbow Laces campaign, encouraging professional footballers at all levels to wear rainbow coloured laces on their football boots as a show of support. As Barton explains in an interview in *Attitude* magazine (Rigby, 2014), “The key is getting the message out to the public that us lads are supportive of fellow pros and supporters, no matter what their sexual orientation.” As part of the same campaign, rainbow laces were sent to every professional footballer in the UK encouraging them to wear their rainbow laces and support the campaign. Players and fans alike were also encouraged to use social media to tweet their support. Supporting the campaign, Premier League football team Arsenal released a video advert (in association with Stonewall and bookmakers Paddy Power). The video features household names: Spain international players Santi Cazorla and Mikel Arteta, France international Olivier Giroud, and England internationals Theo Walcott and Alex-Oxlade Chamberlain. They each light-heartedly suggest something that they cannot change about themselves, with the voice-over stating that “players are lacing up to kick homophobia out of football” accompanied by the Twitter hashtag #rainbowlaces encouraging viewers to tweet their support and “change the game.”

Perhaps reflecting Joey Barton’s call for professional footballers and people with social impact to stand up and speak out against homophobia and in support of gay footballers, a number of other professional players have begun to do so. In the wake of former German international Thomas Hitzlsperger’s decision to come out, Premier League footballer and England international John Ruddy (of Norwich City) was asked

in a press conference whether he thought there had been a “change in the climate of football” and how he as a player reacted to Hitzlsperger coming out. Ruddy told the media:

Well, I sort of reacted in the manner that he's just come out as Thomas Hitzlsperger, you know, it's as simple as that. He is who he is, he is what he is. It's neither here nor there for me. He's been a fantastic servant for every club he's been at and you know from what I know from when he was Everton last season I think it was, you know, the lads really enjoyed him around, so for me if someone's gay, no matter what they do it doesn't really matter to me, it's the person they are that makes them who they are and if they're a friendly person then you get on with them and if they're not you might not get on with them, but their sexuality has nothing to do with that.

When asked whether he thought the climate was changing and if a player should be able to come out *during* their career, rather than after when retired, Ruddy notes: “Yeah, I don't see why not, but I think it's going to take a big step for someone to do that, but, you know, I certainly know if anyone done it at a club I was playing at then they'd have nothing but full support from myself and certainly in this dressing room and here as well, so, you know, we're fully behind anyone who wants to come out as gay or whatever, so you know, like I said it's just the person they are, it doesn't change just because of their sexuality.”

In 2014, Millwall football club also released a video highlighting their support for the *Football v Homophobia* campaign: an international campaign aimed at tackling prejudice against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in grassroots football. Professional footballer Danny Shittu of Millwall FC discussed the campaign in the video and offering his support for gay footballers:

From what it was a couple of years ago to now, people are obviously feeling a lot more comfortable talking about it, and coming out, so definitely I think this will definitely help on the homophobia side and letting people come out and it's very important that Millwall play their part as well which they are you know they've been at the forefront when it comes to racism and any other part of, you know, discrimination so it's just great that there's something else that they're supporting.

Shittu's teammates Shane Lowry also appears in the video to give his support to the campaign, and when asked "if it did happen" that a gay player came out and what he would "hope for and expect", shows good knowledge of the situation with regards to gay athletes. On camera, Lowry states that:

I would expect you know positive support from everyone in the football community you know we've shown in other sports Gareth Thomas [rugby union] and Tom Daley [Olympic diving] they've come out and they've had fantastic support you know through the media and through fans etc., and we've seen Robbie Rogers who used to play at Leeds and Thomas Hitzlsperger now even though he came out after he retired you know he's had fantastic support and you know it doesn't change them as a human being, they'll still be the same person. If someone at Millwall, for instance, come out, you know it'd be widely accepted in my opinion by all the lads so you know, it's a touchy subject for people but you know I think for the good of the game you know if someone did come out in football they'd get the support they needed.

This growing public commentary on gay footballers and gay rights by those within the professional ranks is unprecedented in the history of the game. However, perhaps the most high profile player to offer their support to gay footballers, has been professional footballer (ex-Chelsea, Manchester City and now New York Red Bulls) and ex-England international Frank Lampard OBE. Lampard's credentials as a professional player are exceptional. He is the all-time leading goalscorer (211 goals) for Chelsea football club where he played for 13 years. He has amassed over 600 Premier League appearances and over 800 total professional career appearances, scoring over 200 goals. He has won three Premier League titles, four F.A. Cups, three League Cups, the Champions League, and the Europa League. He is second in the Premier League's all-time assists table. He is one of only a handful of English players to make over 100 appearances for the England national team, and has been runner up in both the FIFA World Player of the Year and the European equivalent, the Ballon d'Or . He is widely considered by journalists and football experts as one of the best footballers of his generation, and acknowledged by some ex-Chelsea teammates as the greatest ever Chelsea player. In an interview with comedian and chat-show host Alan Carr on his nationally-televised TV show *Chatty Man*, Lampard is asked by Carr whether the British public would ever be likely to "see a gay footballer" (c.f. Selby, 2015). Lampard replied: "I think a lot of

the problem is, as you say, it's a fact that it will be out there, as it is in all modern life at all times, but I think we are probably at fault as a sport." He adds: "It's like that old syndrome where it's 'a man's game' and you can't talk about that, and I have to say the game's changing a lot." Much like Graeme Le Saux who experienced a career spanning over a decade and was able to speak to the changing dressing room culture in the professional game, Lampard comments that: "There's a lot of campaigns. I feel it in the dressing room. There's a different feel about it." Lampard adds, "I would love it if someone came out and everyone treated it with respect, you know that silly thing about 'we're macho, we play football', is very old hat."

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

For someone of Frank Lampard's stature in the professional game to speak openly about gay footballers, and to lend his support to gay footballers thinking about coming out, is truly new territory in the contemporary age of professional football. Needless to say, Justin Fashanu did not have such support back in the 1980s. Never before has cultural homophobia been so low as it is today, and never before have so many professional footballers publicly expressed their support for their gay colleagues. Frank Lampard, therefore, provides a vision for the future of professional footballers in England; a future in which professional footballers speak out, as Joey Barton has urged his professional colleagues to do so, on gay rights issues and the 'issue' of gay footballers. In this chapter I have outlined both 'traditional' and 'contemporary' perspectives on masculinity, focusing on the relationship between sport and masculinities. Since homophobia has been acknowledged as a central tenet of masculinity in Western cultures in previous years, I have discussed the situation with regards to wider levels of cultural homophobia, and I have also discussed homophobia within sport across Western cultures such as the US and UK where sports have been traditionally valued as mechanisms of masculinity-making.

I have ended this chapter with a reflection on homophobia specifically in English professional football, and have acknowledged a growing context of support for gay footballers, including a rise in the on-camera appearances of professional players speaking out against homophobia. Some, like professional footballer Joey Barton have been particularly vocal with their support, utilising social media platforms like Twitter to

express their views and create a more vibrant conversation on gay rights and gay footballers than has ever been seen before. In recent years a handful of gay athletes in both the US and UK have come out, too, creating opportunities for other professionals, social commentators, and fans to express their views. The story of openly gay professional footballer Robbie Rogers who came out and then retired in the same day, and then subsequently made a comeback into the game in the US, provides a meaningful counter-narrative to the idea that gay athletes cannot come out and remain active in their sport.

While there remains some confusion among fans, players, and the media over who is 'to blame' for their being no openly gay professional footballers in England (it seems that fans sometimes blame the players and coaches, and players sometimes blame the fans, and the media blames everyone else), it is interesting to note that some contemporary research on homophobia among fans (c.f. Cleland and Cashmore, 2012), the media (c.f. Cleland, 2014), and 16-18 year old academy footballers (c.f. Magrath, Anderson, and Roberts, 2013) - as well as the contextual evidence I have discussed above with regards to Joey Barton, Frank Lampard, and Robbie Rogers, etc., - provides evidence for the changing landscape of masculinities and sport, and suggests an increasingly progressive and liberalised atmosphere in professional football contexts. In short, what I have outlined above is the wider sport context in which I conduct my own research on youth academy footballers in an English professional football academy in the South West of England.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF IDENTITIES AND MASCULINITIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this theoretical chapter I explore what the changing social landscape means for men, masculinities, and their relationship to gender relations, homophobia and social (in)equality. In previous chapters I have outlined the research which has contributed to contemporary understandings of sport, gender, and homophobia. Since homophobia has been considered a central tenet of masculinity and what it means to be a man in modern times (c.f. Kimmel, 1994), and particularly in modern sports settings in Western cultures, this is something I have paid significant attention to. I have also outlined how sport, gender and homophobia have intersected with boyhood and the organisation of youth sports. Moreover, I have examined the positioning of gay rights and support for gay athletes (for example, Robbie Rogers, Gareth Thomas, Michael Sam, and Keegan Hirst) in Western cultures such as the UK and US, providing a contemporary context of professional football in the UK through a discussion of anti-homophobia and pro-gay 'straight allies' in the world of football, such as Joey Barton and Frank Lampard (among others), and large-scale survey research by Cashmore and Cleland (2012) which suggests that football fans in England would be tolerant and supportive of gay footballers.

In this next chapter, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of gender, sexuality, and masculinities. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionist perspective and Goffman's (1961) work on (total) institutions and identities, I discuss the concepts of identity and the 'self', in order to build an understanding of how social establishments contribute to the (re)formation of identities in contemporary Western cultures. At the most foundational level, this discussion looks at the sociological debate about to what extent identities are biologically or socially formed (nature v nurture), and how much identity-formation is controlled by our-selves (agency) or by others (structure). Next, I examine some of the theory that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s that formed the foundation of sociological thinking on what it means to be a man in Western societies, tracing the trajectory of social constructionist thinking in the field of

identities and its application to research in the field of gender and masculinities (e.g. West and Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005; Messner, 1992).

From here, I engage with the most recent theorising on men and masculinities, drawing on Anderson's (2009) notions of 'inclusive' and 'orthodox' masculinities and his inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) which suggests that in places and times of rapidly decreasing cultural homophobia (i.e. the 21st Century in UK and US) multiple masculinities can exist without hierarchy or homophobia. Anderson's inclusive masculinities, therefore, emerges as a forward-looking attempt at conceptualising contemporary masculinities that attempts to move beyond Connell's (1987, 1995) hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT) which suggests that multiple forms of masculinity exist in a hierarchy based on homophobia and patriarchy, and Messner's (1992) subsequent application of hegemonic masculinity theory in relation to male competitive sports. Finally, I highlight some of the emerging critiques of inclusive masculinity theory (c.f. Nagel, 2010; Pringle, 2010; Martino, 2011; Vacarro, 2011; Warin, 2013; Ingram and Waller, 2014; Kehler, 2014; Negy, 2014; Parent, Batura and Crooks, 2014; Plummer, 2014; De Boise, 2015; O'Neill, 2015) as well as recent scholarship around the idea of *hybrid masculinities* which may appear aesthetically or stylistically inclusive but which lack substance and do little to challenge social inequality and patriarchal gender relations (Demetriou, 2001; Messner, 2007; Bridges, 2014). I draw on these critiques and scholarship as a way of reflecting on my previous published work in relation to IMT (e.g. Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2010; Anderson, Adams, and Rivers, 2010; Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010) and to develop a suitable theoretical framework from which I position my own analysis in the subsequent empirical chapters of this PhD thesis.

4.2 SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND THE SELF

Jenkins (2008, p.18) captures the idea of identity as being an individual's "understanding of who [I am]" in relation to their understanding of "who other people are." In this regard, Jenkins notes, one's *own* identity, or sense of self, is understood *in relation to others*; that is, social identities emerge from the interplay between individuals and their everyday interactions with other people. Identity, therefore, can be understood as a *social* concept, rooted in the ever-changing and fluid dynamics of

the social world in which we participate, push, and pull. From this world-view, *fluidity* and *change* are the hallmarks of social identity, rather than fixity or permanence. Reinforcing this idea of identities as rooted in relationships, sociologist Goffman (1961, p.280) writes that:

Without something to belong to, we have no stable self...Our sense of being a person can come from being drawn into a wider social unit; our sense of selfhood can arise through the little ways in which we resist the pull. Our status is backed by the solid buildings of the world, while our sense of personal identity often resides in the cracks.

This idea of Goffman's (1961) captured in his book *Asylums*, that it is only "*against something*" (p.280) that the self can emerge, and that the self "resides in the arrangements prevailing in a social system" (p.154), succinctly captures identity as a relational concept. "Each self," as Goffman (1961, p.154) writes, "occurs within the confines of an institutional system." Put differently, argues Goffman (*ibid*), the self is not a "property" of the individual person. The institution does not "support the self"; the institution "constitutes" the self.

Further enriching the idea that human identities are deeply interconnected with human social structures and social organisation, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.68) have also noted that:

The period during which the human organism develops towards its completion in interrelationship with its environment is also the period during which the human self is formed. The formations of the self, then, must also be understood in relation to both the ongoing organismic development and the social process in which the natural and the human environment are mediated through the significant others...It goes without saying, then, that the organism and, even more, the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped.

Within this framework of understanding, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.149) point out that: "The individual...is not born a member of society. He is born with a predisposition towards sociality, and he becomes a member of society." In this sense, the socialization of each individual into an existing society is a complex task. The individual may come to "understand" the world in which they live, and subsequently this world becomes their own – this is an important point, that not only do we live in the world, but "we participate in each other's being" (c.f. Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.150):

“the relationship between the individual and the objective social world is like an ongoing balancing act” (ibid, p.154). Put differently, individuals can be conceived of as being *active* in the construction of a world that simultaneously acts back upon them. Individual human beings *live* in the cracks of society, to rework Goffman’s analysis – they shape and are shaped by the institutions and structures within and between which those cracks have formed. Essentially, this is the social constructionist perspective.

4.2.1 A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVE OF ‘INDIVIDUALS’ AND ‘SOCIETY’

Society presents the candidate for socialization with a predefined set of significant others, whom he must accept as such with no possibility of opting for another arrangement...Although the child is not simply passive in the process of his socialization, it is the adults who set the rules of the game. The child can play the game with enthusiasm or with sullen resistance. But, alas, there is no other game around...Since the child has no choice in the selection of his significant others, his identification with them is quasi-automatic. For the same reason, his internalization of their particular reality is quasi-inevitable. The child does not internalize the world of his significant others as one of many possible worlds. He internalizes it as *the* world, the only existent and only conceivable world...

(Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p.154)

Social constructionist thinkers (e.g. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 1995; Gergen, 2009) have noted that the central concern of social constructionism is to understand, question, and challenge our everyday, preconceived notions of reality. At the heart of the social constructionist argument, as outlined by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in their seminal text *The Social Construction of Reality*, is the idea that, humans’ social “structures” are *not* predetermined by their “biological equipment.” Instead, Berger and Luckmann argue for a way of looking at individual identity development and social development as intertwined with “organismic development” and the “biological being,” or rather that there is a *dialectical relationship* between individuals and society. As they write (1966, p.65):

...the process of becoming man takes place in an interrelationship with an environment. This statement gains significance if one reflects that this environment is both a natural and a human one. That is, the developing human being not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific cultural and social order, which is mediated to him by the significant others who have charge of him. Not only is the survival of the human infant dependent upon certain social arrangements, the direction of his organismic development is socially determined. From the moment of birth, man’s organismic

development, and indeed a large part of his biological being as such, are subjected to continuing socially determined interference.

Furthermore, Berger and Luckmann (ibid, p.66-67) note that:

The ways of becoming a man are as numerous as man's cultures...Humanness is socio-culturally variable...there is no human nature in the sense of a biologically fixed substratum determining the variability of socio-cultural formations. There is only human nature in the sense of anthropological constants...that delimit and permit man's socio-cultural formations.

According to Berger and Luckmann (ibid, p.67), therefore: "while it is possible to say that man has a nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or more simply, that man produces himself." The social constructionist perspective, therefore, is a way of thinking about how "man" (that is, the *individual* human being) is "produced" in a dialectical relationship between the individual and society. Of central importance to the social constructionist perspective is the ways that the individual (self) and wider social structures or, to put it differently, pre-existing systems of relations that the individual is born into, interact to (re)produce particular (social) identities and ways of experiencing or *being* in the world.

Importantly, this is not a socially deterministic way of thinking, as Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.172) are clear to point out, since this is not a grand conspiracy to define a social world that "traps" individuals into a (potentially) unhealthy emotional intensity. Thus, they note (p.172), the social constructionist perspective allows for an analysis of individual interactions, relationships and identities (that is, "everyday lives") as being "played out" against the "backdrop" of "taken-for-granted" social structures. Essentially, what Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.183) are proposing is the idea that: "socialization always takes place in the context of a specific social structure."

What this means for my own analysis, therefore, is that any analysis of "everyday life" (for example peer interactions and friendships in the football academy) must *always* be fore-grounded by an understanding of *structural* aspects of the setting, that is, a *macro*-sociological perspective. In an empirical sense, this is something I have attempted to achieve in my introduction and literature chapters (CHAPTER ONE, CHAPTER TWO and CHAPTER THREE) as a way of contextualising my own data chapters.

In other words, Berger and Luckmann suggest that researchers must be acutely aware of how society (historical, political, economic, cultural and social structures, meanings and values) may limit, orient, or *guide* the manner in which the individual organism (i.e. the academy footballer) may live, think, and feel. “In this dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world,” write Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.204), “the human organism is transformed.” The ways in which the individual, that is, the *self*, may be “transformed,” is something I would like to expand upon a little more, as the idea that wider social structures, institutions and configurations (or systems of organisation) interact with our own identity, or *sense of self*, suggest something beyond conscious identity formation in which we *knowingly* construct our own “self” – that is, the ways that we *embody* particular world-views in the ways we move and speak, and the political, cultural, and social lenses and filters through which we interpret our own positioning in the world, and through which we interpret the actions of others.

According to social theorists such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Goffman (1961), living life in a particular structural (think: historical, political, economic, cultural, and social) context, therefore, means, unavoidably (and necessarily), “breathing in” these inclinations and expectations much like we breathe in the air around us. Others, such as Bourdieu (1990, p.66-67) have called these inclinations and expectations, *habitus*, that is, the styles, tastes, bodily skills and learned habits that are anchored in the daily practices of individuals, and all the things that “go without saying” within a culture or group. Pre-dating Bourdieu, Goffman (1961, p.24) called these ways of doing life and going about activities as the “presenting culture” of an individual, derived from their “home world.” Put differently, these theorists note that to become fully socialised “normal” human beings in particular contexts, *demands* that individuals inhale and soak up all of the cultural expectations and ways of thinking which make up the world they share with their fellow humans, such that these ways of thinking begin to flow and emanate from our very being, possessing us, rather than simply being an *act* that we consciously *do*.

Making matters more complex, Fowler (2000, p.59) notes that acknowledging the perspective that cultures can possess the individuals’ ‘self’ is not simply giving in to

some kind of social deterministic viewpoint; instead, as Fowler points out (ibid, p.59), it is important to consider that culture is constructed by humans and is ever-changing, such that “changes in conditions effect a change in the architecture of the mind.” In other words, while individual minds may be embedded in ‘hard-and-fast’ cultures, it is important to remember that it *is* possible to change minds, and it *is* possible to change cultures.

4.2.2 GOFFMAN’S TOTAL INSTITUTIONS AND PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL ACADEMIES

A total institution may be defined as a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.

(Goffman, 1961, p.11)

Reworking Goffman’s (1961) work on asylums and ‘total institutions,’ it is possible to suggest that the organisations and social establishments, places in which people play out their everyday lives (for example, football academies), in the way that they tell people what to do and why they should do those things, gives people an indication of “all that [they] may be” (ibid, p.165). It is important to note that football academies do not perfectly exemplify Goffman’s (1961) ‘total institutions’ (ibid, p.16), although they do share a number of characteristics: for example, football academies could reasonably be thought of as “established the better to pursue some worklike task” (ibid, p.16) and “serving as training stations” (ibid, p.16).

Goffman (1961, p.17) highlights four central features of total institutions. Football academies do not fit Goffman’s conceptually totally, although I would argue the features he outlines do have some transferability to the academy setting. First, Goffman notes that in total institutions “all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority.” Second, daily activities are “carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others...required to do the same thing together.” Third, Goffman highlights how, in total institutions, “all phases of the day’s activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading to a prearranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings.” Finally, these various activities are “brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution.”

Drawing on my own experience as a young player and later an academy coach, a number of these features are relevant to an analysis of the football academy: for the benefit of readers less familiar with the workings of the academy system, football academies are organised such that boys undertake training activities in the same place, under the authority of an adult coach or group of coaches, activities are undertaken as a team or 'batch' of others, in which training activities are tightly scheduled by the coaches (individual session plans with timings for activities) and imposed from above by lead-coaches who design rational plans (e.g. a weekly/monthly/annual training syllabus or curriculum) to fulfil the aims of the institution (the production of professional players to go into the first team or sold on to other clubs for profit). Moreover, characteristically, academy players themselves are *not* consulted regarding the development and implementation of institutional plans. According to Goffman (1961, p.19) social mobility between the two strata (inmates and staff) is "grossly restricted," although in football academies such as West-Side there is a tendency for coaches themselves to be former academy players. Typically, academy coaches will have 'played the game' but failed to some degree to 'make it' or sustain a professional career: thus – to use Goffman's asylum analogy – football academies might loosely be thought of as asylums taken over by the inmates.

Of course, as noted, football academies are not total institutions in the same sense as Goffman's mental hospitals or prisons. Academy players *willingly* come in to football academies to participate and then go home with parents and guardians, unlike the "inmates" of Goffman's (1961) asylums. Academy players will therefore maintain contact with families and schools and therefore generally remain integrated with the outside community – as Goffman writes (1961, p.22): they can "escape the encompassing tendency of the total institution."

4.2.3 INSTITUTIONALIZATION, COLONIZATION, AND DISCONNECTION

The recruit comes into the establishment with a conception of himself made possible by certain stable social arrangements in his home world. Upon entrance...His self is systematically, if often unintentionally mortified.

(Goffman, 1961, p.24)

Goffman's work highlights how institutions such as football academies – while not to be considered as *determining* identity and self-formation – should be considered as setting some *parameters* for the kinds of self and identity that can be (re)constructed as we engage and interact as active, individual agents with other active, individual agents in these settings. Capturing this sentiment, that the structure and culture of institutions can “nudge” individuals towards particular ways of being, Goffman (1961, p.165) writes:

Every organization, then, involves a discipline of activity...[and] at some level every organization also involves a discipline of being – an obligation to be of a given character and to dwell in a given world.

In summary, the work of Goffman is helpful in explaining how the disciplining of *activity* plays a significant role in the disciplining of *being*, that is, the disciplining of the “self.” Goffman discusses this connection in terms of *institutionalisation* and the *colonization* of the self. In other words, he describes how the individual ‘self’ can become *colonized* by the culture and values of the group and social structure within which they are embroiled and enmeshed. This is, perhaps, a “hyper” form of socialisation; that is, socialisation to-the-extreme. Importantly, Goffman notes that while the group may become more desirable to the individual, it can also potentially further disconnect them from the “outside” world.

Goffman's discussion of “colonized life-worlds,” “institutionalisation,” and “disconnection” from wider social life resonate more so, when read in the context of professional football, a widely-embraced sport in English culture, which raises excitement in the hearts and minds of many people, particularly boys engaged in organised training activities to *become* professional footballers. Of course, it is important not to view engagement with social establishments as straightforward socialisation/institutionalisation. As I have noted above, the matter is more complex than this. Given credence to the agency of the individual, Goffman reminds us (1961, p.279), “embracement” is not all we will see when we examine social establishments: resistance to the establishment and “the practice of reserving something of oneself from the clutch of an institution” will also be part of the process. Continuing, Goffman adds: “We always find the individual employing methods to keep some distance, some

elbow room, between himself and that with which others assume he should be identified" (p.279).

In the cycle of adult socialisation, identity construction, and formation of the self, therefore, each individual is constantly engaged in congealing around and resisting various sets of beliefs about the world and (importantly) *updating* the ways they conceive of themselves (Goffman called this the *moral career*). Having established some of the ways that the individual and society are connected in social constructionist ways of thinking, it is now helpful to situate some of these (sometimes quite abstract) ideas within the system of *gender* relations.

4.3 GENDER-RELATIONS: HIERARCHY, HOMOPHOBIA, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITIES

In CHAPTER TWO, I highlighted the work of Messner (1992, p.33) who suggested that, once "enmeshed" in the realities of sport - that is, sport as an organised and competitive activity - the reality for many young boys and men is that playing competitive sport may serve to filter them away from emotionally close relationships with peers, away from the "safe" connections they desire, away from intimacy and trust-filled friendships, and instead deliver them into a world of (i) *hierarchy* and (ii) *homophobia*. In the following sections, drawing on a combination of theoretical and empirical work around boyhood, masculinities, and identity development (e.g. West and Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 1987, 1995; Messner, 1992; 2000) , I discuss how these two systems of relations (heirarchy and homophobia) have been threaded through the lives of boys in modern times, traditionally forming a web within which boys experienced their relationships with themselves and others. Following this, drawing on the *inclusive masculinity* work of Anderson (e.g. 2005, 2009), I then acknowledge that theorising about masculinities and the role of homophobia in boys and men's lives has more recently been contested.

4.3.1 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND GENDER

With regard to "masculine characters," R.W. Connell (2000, p.69) has suggested that, each individual male is not socialised into a universal "male sex role," but instead:

There are different kinds of masculine character within society that stand in complex relations of dominance over and subordination to each other. What in

earlier views of the problem passed for the 'male sex role' is best seen as hegemonic masculinity, the culturally idealized form of masculine character (in a given historical setting), which may not be the usual form of masculinity at all.

As outlined so far in this chapter, the ideas of *social constructionism* have been particularly useful in thinking about how the social world (re)forms and in formulating critical perspectives on a host of social themes. These ideas have become the foundations upon which much research (e.g. Anderson, 2005ab; Connell, 1995, 2000; Messner, 1992; West and Zimmerman, 1987) has explored (the social construction of) gender in both sporting and non-sporting contexts. These sociologists who ascribe to a (predominantly) social constructionist way of thinking reject socio-biological, essentialist notions that boys and girls are simply 'hard-wired' differently, or that 'boys will be boys'.

Operating from the traditions of sociologist Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical analysis (wherein everyday interactions are conceptualised as "performances" given by "actors" to an "audience" in a setting or "stage"), West and Zimmerman (1987) describe a "doing" of gender; the central idea being that gender (whether our behaviours are socially coded as *masculine* or *feminine*) is not naturally ascribed, inherent, or fixed to our biological sex. In contrast to socio-biological models, West and Zimmerman's (1987) pivotal work centred on the argument that interwoven into people's everyday interactions was the constant and dynamic "performance" of gender, or what they called "doing gender." In continually and repeatedly *doing gender* in their everyday interactions, West and Zimmerman suggested that people were (socially) constructing masculine *dominance* and feminine *deference*.

In thinking about boys' interactions and experiences within professional football academies and the professional football industry, West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender" has proved to be a valuable point of reference for thinking about how boys identities and the male "self" in this setting may be (re)constructed through everyday interactions, when such interactions take shape, congeal and intersect with/around ideas and representations of masculinity and femininity. Summarising some of the above ideas of social constructionism and the social construction of masculinities in contemporary social life, Kimmel and Messner (2007,

p.xxi), reworking Berger and Luckmann (1966) who previously described 'men' as being *made*, not born, note that:

Men are not born, growing from infants through boyhood to manhood, to follow a predetermined biological imperative encoded in their physical organization. To be a man is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being. Men are not born, they are made. And men make themselves, actively constructing their masculinities within a social and historical context.

My use of the social constructionist perspective, therefore, follows a contemporary trend in feminist gender studies; one in which gender has tended to be viewed as a "way of being" that is constructed within a given situation, *against* particular social, cultural, political and historical arrangements, through the actions of individual agents, rather than as some "thing" that each individual possesses (or not). Put differently, I ascribe to the position that individuals are free to enact gender to the extent that their "freedom" is largely *enabled* and *constrained within* social arrangements, configurations, and systems. While the debate over how 'free' individuals are and how much they can affect their social conditions has been central to much sociological thinking, Messner (2000, p.185) speaks to this dialectic between individual freedom (agency) and social arrangements (structure) when he notes that, without a consideration of structural and cultural contexts, individuals' behaviour can often be misinterpreted as "the inevitable surface manifestations of a natural inner essence of sex difference."

Just as Connell (1995) points out, therefore, it is important that sociologists recognise that gender identities are socially-constructed. With regard to men's *gendered* behaviour, any understanding of the "reality" of gender must therefore not view gender-differences as "natural" or biologically-fixed (essentialism), nor think of gender socialisation as occurring in smooth ways across social settings, cultures, and political-historical contexts, but importantly take gender to be socially-constructed in multiple and varied ways in *relation* to the individual, institutional, cultural and historical contexts in which it is observed. Put differently, what Connell is suggesting is that men are not "naturally" masculine, and women are not "naturally" feminine. However, because many men *do* "perform" in (hyper)masculine ways, and many women *do* "perform" in (hyper)feminine ways, it is easy to see why it has become culturally taken-for-granted

that men *are* (or *should be*) masculine and women *are* (or *should be*) feminine, and that this is the “essential” or “natural” order, or “reality,” of things. This idea, that multiple forms of masculinity exist and that within this pluralised framework of *masculinities* particular forms of masculinity retain more social esteem than others, is something R.W. Connell (1987, 1995) has explored extensively through the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

4.3.2 HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted.
(Connell, 2005, p.77)

The notion of hegemony, coined by Antonio Gramsci (1971), describes a process by which a ruling class comes to dominate a society, securing the acceptance and support of those below them in the social structure. Gramsci suggests that hegemony functions through complicity, rather than force; put differently, the dominant (*hegemonic*) group ensures the complicity of a *subordinated* group by persuading them to believe that their subordination is justified. In this sense, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony has been useful in explaining the subordination of various groups in society at different times, and has therefore found application in the analysis of gender relations, that is, to explain the stratification of men/women and the role of patriarchy in contemporary Western cultures. The most influential theory in doing this has been R.W. Connell’s (1987, 1995) concept of *hegemonic masculinity*.

In the influential book *Masculinities*, Connell develops this theoretical framework in order to fill-in-the-gaps that the earlier “sex-role” framework did not account for – (i) patriarchal power (men’s dominance over women), and (ii) social change, particularly change that occurs *internally*, that is, *within* gender relations themselves. As Connell (1987, p.53) explains:

Change is always something that happens to sex roles, that impinges on them. It comes from outside, from society at large, as in discussion of how technological and economic changes demand a shift to a modern male role...Sex role theory has no way of grasping change as a dialectic within gender relations themselves.

Connell (1987), like West and Zimmerman (1987), and pre-empting Butler’s (1990) notion of gender as being *performatively* constituted, argues that gender is not a fixed

set of social norms, but is constantly (re)produced in social practice. In other words, it is a performed social identity, and takes place in different cultural and historical contexts. In order to understand the power relations *in and between* genders, therefore, Connell (1987) suggests that we must speak of gender not in terms of masculinity/femininity, but rather in terms of masculinities/femininities. Connell's contribution to the study of gender relations, therefore, is to discuss the existence of *multiple* masculinities and the power dynamics between them.

However, more fundamental to Connell's analysis, writes Demetriou (2001, p.343) is the idea that "the structural dominance of men over women provides the essential foundation on which forms of masculinity and femininity are differentiated and hierarchically ordered." In other words, men's internal subordination of other men is not so much important in its own right, but instead serves as a means to achieve the primary function of reproducing men's subordination of women. As a social constructionist theory of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity theory thoroughly dismantles, dismisses and transcends sex role theory's reliance on biological determinism, and helps to explain the *socially-constructed* processes by which boys and men are stratified within a masculine hierarchy, always over women.

At a basic level, hegemonic masculinity theory explains that the closer boys and men are to the dominant form of masculinity (of-the-time) in any society, the more "masculine cultural capital" (Laberge, 1995, p.143; see also Bourdieu, 1986; Anderson, 2002, 2005) – that is, cultural esteem and social privilege – they maintain. On the flip-side of this process, failing to approximate closely-enough this culturally esteemed model of masculinity, and deviating from its rigidly-defined boundaries, results in ostracism, marginalisation, and subordination. Accordingly, as Connell (1987) suggests, those at the bottom of the hierarchy are targeted for their non-conformity, and, importantly, in Western cultures where homosexuality has traditionally been stigmatized and heterosexual masculinity (hetero-masculinity) has traditionally been culturally-dominant, boys and men who deviate from hetero-masculine boundaries may suffer public homosexualisation; in this sense, as documented by multiple researchers in previous decades (see for example, Burn, 2000; Fine, 1987; Kimmel, 1994; Messner, 1992; Plummer, 1999; Pronger, 1990; Thurlow, 2001), homophobia

has been used as a weapon of masculine stratification. Indeed, while today the *intent* of 'homosexually-themed' language among young people has been contested (e.g. McCormack and Anderson, 2010ab; McCormack, 2011ab, 2012), these sociologists have previously shown, that one of the most effective ways of accomplishing orthodox masculinity and proving one's heterosexuality in recent decades in Western cultures has been through the use of homophobic language (I have explored this more in previous chapters).

In summary, returning to the central notion of Connell's argument, hegemonic masculinity theory not only provides an understanding of (i) how men are stratified internally in relation to a hegemonic form of masculinity (internal hegemony), but also (ii) how this inter-masculine ranking among men helps us to understand the role of patriarchy, that is men's dominance in relation to women (external hegemony). Connell is clear on this point; that in a patriarchal society, *some* men maintain hegemony over other men, but *all* men maintain hegemony over women. This point is pivotal in understanding hegemonic masculinity theory and gender relations in contemporary Western cultures; that some men accept a subordinated position to other 'leading' men, in order for *all* men to dominate *all* women and sustain the privileges consistent with the patriarchal project of domination. Recently, however, Anderson (2009) has contested the premise that 'masculinity' can be characterised in terms of 'hegemonic' and 'subordinated' masculinities, and thus the ongoing utility of Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory, offering a theory of *Inclusive Masculinity* as an alternative framework through which to explore contemporary masculinities. As Anderson (2009, p.9) writes:

Inclusive masculinity theory serves as a social-constructionist theory that simultaneously incorporates (during high periods of homophobia) and challenges (during diminishing and diminished periods of cultural homophobia) Connell's (1987) theorizing.

4.3.3 INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES

In 2005, four years prior to explicating his theory of *inclusive masculinities*, Eric Anderson hinted at a changing organisation of masculinities and a changing relationships between older 'conservative' forms of masculinity (orthodox

masculinities) and newer 'softer' forms of masculinity (inclusive masculinities) in contemporary Western cultures. As Anderson (2005, p.16) wrote:

If the softening of masculinities continues, the older conservative form of masculinity may be less alluring, and the masculinizing context of sport may have to adjust to the new version of masculinity or risk losing its effect on socializing boys and men in the culture as a whole. In other words, if everything changes around sport, sport will either have to change or it will lose its social significance and be viewed as a vestige of an archaic model of masculinity.

While R.W. Connell's *hegemonic masculinity* has in recent decades been the most prominent theory for understanding gender-relations and the social stratification of men in western cultures, some scholars (c.f. Wetherell and Edley 1995; Dimitriou, 2001; Howson, 2006ab; Moller, 2007; Beasley, 2008ab; Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2011) have also begun to debate its utility in examining contemporary Western masculinities. Anderson (2009), for example, suggests that even among masculinity scholars there is a great deal of discussion about what this theory is intended to imply and what it means to be 'hegemonically' masculine in the first place. Noting that: "Connell's (1987) notion of hegemonic masculinity is unable to capture the complexity of what occurs as cultural homophobia diminishes," Anderson (2009, p.7) explains his concept of *homophobia* as "the fear of being homosexualized." Outlining what is perhaps the theoretical framework of his work, Anderson (2009, p.8) writes:

Key to inclusive masculinity theory is that, in moments of higher cultural homophobia, homophobic discourse has traditionally been the most important policing agent of masculinity. Here, homonegative discourse is used to stratify men in deference to a hegemonic mode of dominance (Connell 1987, 1995). And, as multiple masculinity scholars have shown (cf Plummer 1999), in periods of high homophobia boys and men are compelled to act aggressively and to maintain homophobic and sexist attitudes. In such periods, men are also encouraged to raise their masculine capital through sport and muscularity (cf. Pronger 1990) and they remain emotionally distant from one another. In this culture, boys and men are also expected to boast about their heterosexual accomplishments. It is in this cultural zeitgeist that Kimmel suggests homophobia *is* masculinity (1994), and it is in this zeitgeist that I suggest a culture is homophobic.

Continuing his outline of *homophobia* as a central concept in inclusive masculinities theory, Anderson (2009, p.8) writes:

...inclusive masculinity theory argues that in cultures of diminished homophobia, two dominant (but not dominating) forms of masculinity will exist:

One conservative and one inclusive. Because the conservative masculinity is not culturally hegemonic, I call this form 'orthodox masculinity'. Here, men remain homohysterical, and therefore tactically and emotionally distant from one another. Conversely, heterosexual men ascribing to an 'inclusive masculinity' demonstrate emotional and physically homosocial proximity. They include their gay teammates, and are shown to value heterofemininity. Important in this cultural moment, however, is that neither form of masculinity retains cultural hegemony. In this stage, men who value orthodox masculinity might use homophobic discourse with specific intent to demonize homosexuals, while inclusive acting men may use homophobic discourse but without intent to degrade homosexuals.

With regard to my own research findings presented in this thesis in later chapters, Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinities theory is informative, and has helped to supplement my own data collection and understandings of what is going on in terms of masculinities among adolescent boys in a professional football academy. Drawing on Anderson's theorizing in the excerpts presented above, my own research explores masculinity and homophobia, and the use of homophobic discourse. I discuss with the boys I interview the meaning of their use of 'homosexually-themed' discourse (c.f. McCormack, 2012) and examine the levels of what Anderson (2009) calls 'emotional proximity', through an examination of their 'friendships' with one another. I also explore the forms of masculinity that are represented in this context. There are some aspects of Anderson's theory that I could not (or had limited opportunity to) examine, however. In a social space dominated by boys and men, it was difficult to assess the ways they act in relation to girls and women. With no openly gay boys or men, it was also not possible to examine how they directly interacted with homosexual peers, although I was able to ask boys directly about their social experiences with gay peers and their attitudes toward homosexuality and gay athletes. Ultimately, writes Anderson (2009, p.8-9), what researchers uncovering inclusive masculinities will come to find, is that "there will be social inclusion of the form of masculinities that were once traditionally marginalized by hegemonic masculinity." Moreover, Anderson (2009, p.9), notes:

...multiple masculinities will proliferate with less hierarchy or hegemony. There will also be an expansion of acceptable heteromasculine behaviors. In other words, when archetypes of inclusive masculinities proliferate, they do not seem to 'dominate.' This is not simply a matter of a protest version of masculinity competing for cultural hegemony.

Further to Anderson's critique of Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory, others have also called into question its use in contemporary research. Another difficulty with Connell's theory, notes Moller (2007), is that, in social constructionist perspectives on masculinity, hegemonic masculinity maintains near-hegemonic rule. As Moller (2007, p.265) writes:

Connell's theoretical apparatus seduces the way we, as scholars in masculinity studies, think about our object/s of study. The concept of hegemonic masculinity invites readers to look "out there" for particularly nefarious instances of masculinist abuses of power

Reinforcing Moller's analysis, Anderson (2009) argues that the hegemonic status of hegemonic masculinity theory as the go-to theory in masculinity studies may lead to an over-emphasis by scholars on the socio-negative aspects of organised, competitive team sport; which, Anderson adds, may divert academic attention away from the (perhaps more mundane) ways men express more inclusive, feminist-oriented forms of masculinity.

Indeed, as Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) confirm in their review of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, because the hierarchy of masculinity is socially constructed and therefore not *fixed*, multiple masculinities inevitably co-exist within a complex model of gender hierarchy. The implication of this, they suggest (ibid), is that changing the dynamics of gender-relations (that is, hegemonic masculinity) *is* possible. According to Connell and Messerschmidt (ibid), therefore, long-standing ideals of (a hegemonic) hetero-masculinity *are* subject to appropriation, adjustment, change, renegotiation, and translation, and, ultimately *can* be replaced. Anderson (2009, p.5) commenting on Connell's (1987) theory, writes:

...the dominant form of masculinity, in sport or any other cultural location, *can* change...Connell also accounts for the contestation of *any* given form of dominant masculinity. Accordingly, as gender scholars, we all knew that the homophobic, sexist, and violent form of masculinity propagated in competitive team sports *could* change...

Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory, therefore, perhaps retains fragments of hope and optimism that less-dominating, more-*inclusive* forms of masculinity (e.g. Anderson, 2009) can penetrate and proliferate over the sexist, misogynistic, anti-feminine, homophobic forms that have been documented in previous decades. As Connell and

Messerschmidt (2005, p.833) write [*emphasis added*]: “a more humane, less oppressive, means of being a man *might* become hegemonic, as part of a process leading toward an abolition of gender hierarchies.” Indeed, the premise of Anderson’s extensive research (c.f. 2009, p.5) is that “esteemed versions of masculinity among university-attending men are changing.”

The optimism that less oppressive and more inclusive masculinities can proliferate is something Anderson (2005, 2009, 2010) has embraced. Anderson (2010, p.115) argues that “university-attending men are rapidly running from the hegemonic type of masculinity that has been privileged for the past twenty-five years.” He suggests that, in contemporary Western cultures, more-*inclusive* masculinities are emerging which have the capacity to replace the less-inclusive, more-*orthodox* forms that have long been esteemed. Anderson (2009) identifies what he argues to be the most salient trend in the reconstruction of contemporary masculinities: the rapid decline in cultural homophobia, particularly among young males. In explicating his theory, Anderson (2009) draws on the work of multiple other scholars who have documented this trend (c.f. Barnett and Thomson 1996; Loftus 2001; McNair 2002; Widmer, Treas, and Newcomb 1998) to support his argument that masculinities are becoming more inclusive. Others (e.g. Baunach, 2012; Becker, 2012ab; Campbell et al., 2011; Keleher and Smith, 2012; Savin-Williams, 2005; Stotzer, 2009; Altmeyer, 2001; Herek and Capitanio, 1996; Morrison, Speakman, and Ryan, 2009; Roper and Halloran, 2007; Taulke-Johnson, 2008; McCormack and Anderson, 2010; Park and Rhead, 2013; Weeks 2007) have also documented growing levels of acceptance of homosexuality in various settings, and this is of particular interest since decreasing homophobia represents Anderson’s (2009) primary focus for measuring “inclusivity.” Accordingly, there is a rapidly growing body of literature regarding heterosexual men and their increasingly progressive attitudes toward homosexuality in sport (Adams, 2011; Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010; Anderson and Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson 2012; Anderson 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c; 2011; 2014; Anderson and McCormack, 2015; Anderson, McCormack and Lee, 2012; Bush, Anderson and Carr, 2012; Campbell et al., 2011; Cleland, 2013; 2014; Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Harris and Clayton 2007; Kian and Anderson, 2009; Price and Parker, 2003; Southall et al., 2009; Magrath, Anderson,

and Roberts, 2013). In these studies, heterosexual male athletes are found to display acceptance toward homosexuality, a central tenet of what Anderson (2009) calls *inclusive masculinity*.

While this body of research represents a positive trend in masculinities towards inclusivity, Anderson and colleagues (e.g. McCormack and Anderson, 2010) have also noted that the inclusivity documented is not seamless, and that even in inclusive settings where boys exhibit pro-gay attitudes and avoid homophobic language, it is possible that they are still bound in some ways to hetero-masculine boundaries and heteronormative language. Anderson (2009, p.158) has also noted that heterosexism, sexism and patriarchy may still be issues in these settings, even where inclusive masculinities proliferate and where men do not value orthodox masculinity. Importantly, what Anderson's and colleagues' growing body of research suggests is that (white, university-attending) male youth today are not just tolerant or quietly supportive, but many are now *active* allies who vocally express their support of their non-heterosexual or non-heteromasculine peers. While Anderson (2009, p.157) notes that "the *institution* of sport still somewhat values orthodox masculinity," he concludes that (p.159): "We are seeing a shift toward inclusive masculinities, *at least* among university-attending white men."

With regard to sports, the work of Cashmore and Cleland (2012) and Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (2013) has utilised and advanced inclusive masculinities theory, arguing that there is a rapidly decreasing level of homophobia within the culture of football in England. Cashmore and Cleland's (2012) research on football fans, conducted in 2010, highlights that 93 per cent of football fans surveyed (n=3500) stated that there is no place for homophobia in football. Cashmore and Cleland provide empirical findings supporting Anderson's (2009) findings that men's masculinity is shifting away from hegemonic (orthodox) forms toward more inclusive forms. As Cashmore and Cleland (2012, p.383) write: "Traditional conceptions of masculinity remain in football culture, though they are in decline. Rather there is evidence of multiple masculinities of equal cultural value in existence." They also note (ibid, p.383) that, while all fans may not be inclusive, their views expressed in their research "do suggest a movement towards inclusivity and an acceptance of multiple masculinities."

Ultimately, they argue, hegemonic masculinity theory fails to account for football fandom in the 21st Century.

Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (2013) also contribute to the empirical findings on inclusive masculinities and the theorization of (inclusive) masculinities in professional football in the 21st century. Using an interview-only approach, Magrath et al., (2013) found that the attitudes of twenty-two young footballers (aged 16-18) on the English Premier League academy team they surveyed approximated inclusive masculinities. They note (2013, p.2): “these men belong to a generation with inclusive perspectives on homosexuality” and “whether they maintain contact with gay men or not, they nonetheless remain unanimously supportive of gay men coming out on their team.” Their results note that many of the men they interviewed had never met, or known someone who is gay, and Magrath et al. suggest that this may be due to the confines of academy life not allowing them the opportunities of other 16-19 year olds to meet gay males in other social spaces such as college or sixth form. Moreover, Magrath et al. (2013) found that when they asked these men how they would feel if a teammate were to come out, the men responded positively, with support of homosexuality in football. Magrath et al., (2013, p.14) suggest that their results are clear, that these young men are “unbothered by the issue of gays in sport,” thus highlighting an increasing ‘inclusivity’ in sport (c.f. Anderson, 2009). In my own research, I build on Magrath et al.’s (2013) findings, examining some similar themes in relation to the experiences of 14-15 year old boys within a professional football academy.

Others, while not working from an inclusive masculinities framework, have also highlighted findings of inclusivity. For example, evidencing the increasing value of emotional and physical intimacy among heterosexual male athletes, Schrack-Walters, O'Donnell, and Wardlow's (2009) qualitative analysis of men's participation in athletics in the US suggests that the development of communal and emotional affects is becoming increasingly more important between men on sports teams and finds that comments from athletes were laden with emotional intimacy. Encouragingly, Schrack-Walters et al. (2009, p.92) note that, when they heard men express very high levels of affection for each other, “none of the athletes qualified their statements using a heterosexual standard of acceptability.” Importantly, the work of Schrack-Walters et al. (2009) along with that of Anderson (2009) among others (e.g. Magrath et al., 2013),

suggests that representing male athletes as monolithic unemotional “jock” individuals is an inaccurate representation of the experiences and gendered identities of all male athletes, and therefore more research is needed in this area. While I do not contest the emergence of some inclusive masculinities among *some* men in *some* settings, in terms of its empirical grounding, it is predominantly in terms of the theorization of these findings that scholars have been increasingly critical of Anderson’s inclusive masculinity theory (IMT).

4.3.4 CRITIQUES OF INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES

As an attempt to move beyond Connell’s (1987, 1995, 2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity describing the hierarchical relationships of men (*within* gender), and the relationships between men and women (*between* genders), Anderson (2009) and colleagues (c.f. McCormack, 2012, McCormack and Anderson, 2014) have proposed and advanced inclusive masculinity theory as *the* theory of the moment to describe what happens when multiple forms of masculinities proliferate with *less* hierarchy and *no* hegemony; in other words, that Connell’s hierarchical stratification fails to account for gender relations in which “multiple masculinities exist coharmoniously” (c.f. Anderson, 2011, p.254). In summary of inclusive masculinity theory, Anderson (2009) proposes that young men today no longer construct their gendered identities (masculinities) in relation to homosexuality or subordinated subject positions, nor through homophobic language. Anderson (2009) suggests that contemporary masculinity has *shifted* considerably toward ‘inclusivity’, offering evidence (discussed above) to suggest this is the case on a cultural level in the US and UK.

Anderson’s theorising and dozens of empirical papers over the past decade has created substantial debate among gender and masculinities scholars, and ensures that social researchers are continuing to examine the frameworks from which they engage in social research and interpret social trends. In this respect, Anderson’s theorising (2009) developed from hundreds of interviews and ‘multiple ethnographies’ has provided an empirically-rich way of looking at the social world, critiquing the ideas and concepts (such as Connell’s hegemonic masculinity) which may have become taken-for-granted (c.f. Moller, 2007). In this regard, inclusive masculinity theory has played a formative role in my thinking about masculinities in sport and how these might be changing (e.g. Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010; Adams, 2011; Anderson and

Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2012), and subsequently informed the early theoretical and data collection aspects of this thesis.

During this time, other scholars have also begun to find inclusive masculinities to be a useful framework for their own empirical research (e.g. Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Cleland, 2014; Channon and Matthews, 2015; Jarvis, 2015; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2013; McCormack, 2012, 2014). Equally, since Anderson published *Inclusive Masculinity* (2009) a number of scholars have also begun to critically interrogate inclusive masculinity theory (c.f. Nagel, 2010; Pringle, 2010; Martino, 2011; Vacarro, 2011; Warin, 2013; Ingram and Waller, 2014; Kehler, 2014; Negy, 2014; Parent et al., 2014; Plummer, 2014; De Boise, 2015; O'Neill, 2015). The remainder of this chapter explores some of these critiques in more depth and reflects upon my own utilisation of inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) to-date (e.g. Adams, 2011).

One of these early critiques by Pringle (2010) raised a number of concerns. In his review, Pringle (2010) notes that Anderson criticises Connell's structuralist theory, only to replace it with another structuralist theory, while using multiple competing forms of knowledge and theoretical perspectives to do so. Pringle (2010, p.322) also suggests that IMT is "not able to articulate the social processes associated with the construction of masculinities." Finally, Pringle (2010, p.322) critiques IMT on the basis that it "overestimates the significance of homosexuality in shaping men's lives, identities and gender relations," while also neglecting other "important social variables...that shape how men understand themselves and socially interact," including globalization and capitalism. Elsewhere, Marsiglio (2013, p.272) suggests that Anderson's (2009) data does not go "deeply enough...to explore the processes that foster and curtail displays of inclusive masculinity." Moreover, Marsiglio (2013, p.272) notes that Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinity theory has little to say about intersectionality (i.e. age, race/ethnicity, social class), and on these grounds the "provocative conclusion" that inclusive masculinities are proliferating among young men "must be tempered."

Furthermore, Nagel (2010, p.110), while arguing that Anderson's inclusive masculinity theory "challenges the dominant discourse in masculinities studies and interrogates whether multiple forms of masculinity can co-exist as equally valuable expression of masculinity," suggests that (ibid, p.110) "it is unclear whether inclusive forms of

masculinity are actually coexisting alongside orthodox forms of masculinity without vying for dominance as Connell's theory would suggest...it is possible that inclusive masculinities are just beginning to emerge and may come to challenge orthodox forms of masculinity as the hegemonic form of masculinity." Nagel (2010, p.110) questions the privileged status of the men at centre of Anderson's (2009) research, suggesting that: "inclusive forms of masculinity may actually only be available to a select group of otherwise privileged men."

Reviewing McCormack's (2012) research on boys in sixth form colleges (in which McCormack rejects Connell's HMT and instead utilises and advances IMT and the construct of *homohysteria*), Kehler (2014, p.74) has criticised McCormack for the "lack of student voice and narratives" in his research, arguing on these grounds that, in his reading, McCormack's data from his three school ethnographies is "overshadowed" by "a larger ideological argument" in which "the voices of participants are in many ways strategically placed for developing intellectual debate."

The critiques by Pringle (2010), Marsiglio (2010), Nagel (2010), Kehler (2014) are succinctly expressed in book review formats, and perhaps do not represent a uniform critique of IMT. Other critiques (e.g. Negy, 2014; Parent et al., 2014) have critiqued IMT and the concept of *homohysteria* on etymological grounds and the validity of *homohysteria* as a construct distinct from homophobia (Negy, 2014), and for definitional problems in operationalizing *homohysteria* (Parent et al., 2014). McCormack and Anderson (2014) have responded to these critiques, defended their use of *homohysteria*, and – they argue – strengthened its definition. Avoiding etymological and operational arguments and offering a more in-depth look at the theoretical and empirical basis of IMT, however, Ingram and Waller (2014), De Boise (2015) and O'Neill (2015), respectively, offer perhaps the most robust critiques of Anderson's work, unpicking inclusive masculinity theory in great detail. Each critique highlights several theoretical concerns regarding IMT and the work of Anderson and McCormack (c.f. Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012; McCormack and Anderson, 2014). Ingram and Waller (2014), for example, have noted that:

In attempting to update masculinity theory through a revision of Connell's influential theory of hegemonic masculinity Anderson is in danger of throwing the

baby out with the bathwater. His project reduces the plural forms of masculinity argued by Connell to exist on a hierarchical scale to a postmodern co-existence of multiple male cultures that entail no relationship of power.

According to Ingram and Waller, this is particularly problematic, for example, when those with more orthodox views about masculinity and sport continue to dominate key stakeholder positions within the institution of sport. In such instances, power remains highly gendered and masculinised: yet, as Ingram and Waller (2014) point out: “In conceptualising masculinity in this way inclusive masculinity theory, while highlighting changes in masculinity, fails to account for or challenge gender inequalities.” Ingram and Waller instead argue that masculinities research requires a more nuanced approach, and theoretical tools which reflect this understanding of gender. They also argue for a greater emphasis on social class, although admittedly this is something I have not focused on in this current research. Without such a nuanced understanding, they note, “it is easy to fall into the trap of simplistically arguing that men are either inclusive or in crisis.” It is in this sense that Ingram and Waller (2014) describe inclusive masculinities theory as “a blunt tool for analyzing masculinities as it fails to excavate power relations and uncover the continuance of gender related inequalities”.

Elsewhere, De Boise (2015) critiques IMT in relation to Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity, highlighting a number of passages from the work of Anderson and McCormack (c.f. Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2011; McCormack and Anderson, 2014ab) which De Boise suggests are a misreading or misunderstanding of Connell’s work. As De Boise (2015, p.323) writes:

...both Anderson and McCormack frequently refer to hegemonic masculinity as a type of person (Anderson 2011, 252; McCormack 2011a, 338; McCormack and Anderson 2010, 846) or an archetype (Anderson 2009, 32, 36, 93, 94) rather than a web of gendered configurations. As Hearn (2004) and Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) point out, this is a fundamental misreading of what hegemonic masculinity entails. On this point, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005, 842) state specifically: “Although any specification of hegemonic masculinity typically involves the formulation of cultural ideals, it should not be regarded only as a cultural norm.” It is therefore disingenuous to argue, as Anderson does, that Connell claims that “there will on be one hegemonic archetype of masculinity...hegemonic masculinity [is] a hegemonic process by which *one* form of institutionalized masculinity is ‘culturally exalted’ above all others” (Anderson 2009, 93-94 my emphasis).

De Boise (2015, p.323) goes on to note that:

While Anderson (2005, 339; 2009, 30, 45) has stated in some places that hegemonic masculinity is not a type of person, in constantly using the word “archetype” in relation to hegemonic and orthodox masculinity, he confusedly paints gender as a cultural identity that one can “possess,” inadvertently employing Jungian ideas of psychological correlates as prerequisites to action. To this end, his conflation of “orthodox masculinity” with a psychologically stable conception of traditional gender performance, asserts the same fallacy that Connell outlines in relation to Universalist sex-role theory in her initial formulation of hegemonic masculinity. Gender is not stable and the term orthodox, particularly, implies an authentic, historical referential point at which masculinity was fixed. This is precisely the claim that hegemonic masculinity refutes (Connell 1995, 76).

In short, De Boise’s (2015, p.324) first major critique of Anderson’s (2009) inclusive masculinity, is that IMT “wrongly seems to suggest that gender emanated from an internalized, psychological predisposition, rather than the performance as constituting gender (see Butler 2008, 34).”

De Boise’s (2015, p.324) second critique of Anderson’s IMT is that it glosses over Connell’s (1995, p.77) definition of hegemonic masculinity as embodying a “currently accepted strategy,” and hegemony as “a historically mobile relation.” Bringing Connell’s original definition of hegemonic masculinity to the forefront of a discussion about Anderson’s IMT, De Boise (2015, p.324) argues that, given Connell’s definition: “It is curious, then, if hegemony is a flexible, historically mobile relation, why both Anderson and McCormack insist that hegemonic masculinity theory is unable to explain masculinities in periods of low homophobia.” De Boise (2015, p.324) adds:

This is vital, as it may be the case that what Anderson calls “inclusive” is just another hegemonic strategy for some heterosexual, white, middle-class men to legitimately maintain economic, social, and political power in the wake of gay-rights. Thus, the idea of change alongside the continuity of unequal, gender power relations is not particularly unique or new (see Hearn 1999).

De Boise (2015, p.324) draws on Demetriou’s (2001) concept of *hybridity*, to suggest that hegemonic masculinity can “hybridize” to ensure its continued legitimacy, thus “changes in practice may also provide the impression of progress while still protecting the interests of historically privileged groups”. According to De Boise (2015), this understanding, of once subordinated masculinities as being incorporated into hegemonic strategies with little change to institutional inequalities (i.e. “there *must* be a correspondence between institutional power and group practice” – De Boise, 2015,

p.325), is exactly what Anderson's and McCormack's critiques of HMT fail to understand and represent. As De Boise (2015, p.325) notes:

...in focusing on micro-level interaction, Anderson and McCormack solely privilege what could be understood as the "internal" dimensions of hegemony, providing virtually no account of institutional privilege. The unacceptability of overt homophobic speech or violence is now enshrined in legality, which may suggest that homophobia is less integral to hegemonic practices. However, this may do very little to disrupt broader inequalities, hidden prejudice, and the continued institutional privilege of some groups of men (Bridges and Pascoe 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hearn 2004).

On these grounds, De Boise (2015, p.324-325) suggests that rather than discard HMT as Anderson suggests: "a slightly more nuanced reading of hegemonic masculinity may still be entirely compatible with changes in gendered practice."

Furthermore, with regard to Connell's (1995) concepts of *complicit* and *marginal* masculinities, De Boise (2015, p.325) suggests that: "In Connell's view, men who are not overtly sexist or homophobic, therefore, have often stood to gain from a patriarchal hegemony, even if they do not actively engage in many hegemonic practices. In this respect, the conditions that inclusive masculinity describes are also remarkably similar to Connell's discussion of complicity masculinities." Moreover, with regards to Anderson's concept of *orthodox* masculinity, De Boise (2015, p.326) writes:

Similarly, the orthodox vision of masculinity that Anderson describes is not necessarily compatible with Connell's hegemonic configuration. Macho posturing, aggression, and homophobia may actually be more linked to what Connell (1995, 77) describes as marginal subject positions because, as she also states, "this is not to say the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are the most powerful people."

Ultimately, for De Boise (2015, p.326-327), HMT (and the concepts of hegemonic, complicity, marginalised and subordinated masculinities) retains utility in explaining social changes in masculinities, while the "cruder division" of masculinities that Anderson introduces (orthodox and inclusive) should be questioned on the grounds that it diminishes the fluidity of gender and lacks the complexity and nuance of HMT. De Boise (2015) also highlights an issue in Anderson's and McCormack's (and also Roberts', 2013) work of taking respondents' interpretations of whether they consider their behaviour to be homophobic at face value. De Boise notes McCormack and Anderson's claims that "gay discourse" is not homophobia because "there is no intent

to subordinate an individual when used” (c.f. McCormack 2011a, 348). According to De Boise (2015, p.332): “...this is where hegemonic masculinity offers a substantial countercritique,” since:

Even if there is often no *conscious* intent to subordinate or marginalize others, this is often achieved through unquestioned symbolic practices (Coles 2009; Pascoe 2005), naturalized through hegemonic representations, which stigmatize nonheterosexual-identifying individuals. In the same way that telling a young boy to stop behaving “like a girl” is not necessarily a conscious attempt to suggest that femininity should be framed pejoratively, it is precisely a historical awareness of the interplay between language and power that enables social scientists to assume some form of knowledge beyond that amenable to individuals’ direct, conscious interpretation. A narrow definition of homophobia as simply a conscious interpersonal act is therefore stripped of any wider relation to historic or social context. Intention is a specious argument which obfuscates the myriad causes of gender inequalities and which perpetrators can often hide behind, even when confronted by the implications of their actions.

Ultimately, for De Boise (2015, p.333-334), Anderson’s inclusive masculinity “caricatures hegemonic masculinity and lacks the sophisticated theoretical engagement” of other critiques of hegemonic masculinity (e.g. Beasley, 2012; Bridges and Pascoe, 2014; Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005; Demetriou, 2001). As De Boise writes (2015, p.334):

...the fact that Connell (1995) describes hegemony as a “historically mobile relation” and attempts to provide a systematic means for understanding the complexity of patriarchy, alongside Demetriou’s (2001) concept of “hybridization,” indicates that inclusive masculinity adds little to CSMM [critical study of men and masculinities]. In addition...hegemony does not entail a type of individual and can mean multiple hegemonic practices (Coles 2009) and discursive strategies so ‘inclusive’ and ‘orthodox’ masculinities are conceptually flawed. It should also be observed that Connell’s discussion of complicity masculinities’ relationship to hegemonic practices already incorporate the possibility for what Anderson perceives to be historically unprecedented.

In conclusion, De Boise (2015, p.334) writes:

Inclusive masculinity is misleading in that what it claims to document, the inclusion of “others” into more equal gender practices, is actually the inclusion of some white, gay, men, and boys into hegemonic configurations of power and the hybridization of existing hegemonic practices (Bridge and Pascoe 2014).

In another critique of inclusive masculinity theory, O’Neill (2015, p.101) notes that she is “less concerned to dispute inclusive masculinity on empirical grounds than to

interrogate its political underpinnings and effects,” arguing that, in various ways, “Anderson’s work reflects and reproduces a postfeminist sensibility, specifically through the erasure of sexual politics.” O’Neill (2015, p.101) defines postfeminism as “a social and cultural context in which feminism is simultaneously “taken into account” and “undone””, and refers to “an epistemological shift marking a discontinuation with earlier feminist thought,” or a “backlash” against feminism (c.f. Gill, 2007, p.249).

From this perspective, O’Neill (2015) argues that Anderson’s (2009) inclusive masculinity theory perhaps represents a reproduction of the logics of postfeminism. O’Neill (2015, p.105-106) specifically highlights the “affective appeal” of Anderson’s IMT, in that it “appeals to readers’ emotional subjectivities” by telling a “good-news story” of “increasing inclusivity among straight students” (c.f. McCormack, 2012, xxv). O’Neill’s argument is that IMT follows earlier (heavily critiqued) bodies of work in deemphasising gender power relations. By establishing the relationship and continuities between IMT and what she calls “antifeminist” scholarship, O’Neill (2015, p.109) argues that:

within this brand of theorizing, sexual political matters are not simply ignored but are instead presented as *already settled*, or *in the process of being settled*. It is in this regard that parallels can clearly be seen between inclusive masculinity theory and the social cultural context of postfeminism in which it is produced.

O’Neill (2015) proceeds to critique Anderson’s IMT (2009) for its “rhetoric of social change” (p.109), in which social change is read as “logical and inevitable.” O’Neill (2015, p.109) highlights the “circularity of inclusive masculinity theory, whereby decreasing cultural homophobia leads to the development of inclusive masculinities, which are in turn characterized by an absence of homophobia,” and the “teleological narrative of decreasing homophobia that underpins inclusive masculinity theory.” Continuing, O’Neill (2015, p.110) adds that logical and inevitable model of linear and progressive social change, “offers no space to think about *permutations* of patriarchal relations of the development of *new forms* of gender and sexual inequality.” Fleshing out this critique further, O’Neill writes (2015, p.110):

For Anderson (2009, 93), it is not that the theory of hegemonic masculinity is somehow flawed; indeed, hegemonic masculinity theory has provided the framework for some of his earlier work. Rather, Anderson argues that the theory of hegemonic masculinity does not apply to *contemporary masculinities*. That is,

instead of critiquing the theory of hegemonic masculinity on theoretical grounds, Anderson (2009, 32) contends that dramatic social and cultural change *has rendered the theory redundant*. He writes, “what I see occurring in my investigations (of white university-aged men) is not accounted for with hegemonic masculinity theory. Times have changed, and this requires new ways of thinking about gender.” Thus, Anderson’s critique of hegemonic masculinity is based on the understanding that progressive social change has undermined the utility of a concept centrally concerned with the analysis of *gendered power relations*. Because although Anderson discusses hegemonic masculinity as it pertains to understanding power relations between men, the concept was formulated as a means to theorize power dynamics among men *and* between men and women; as Carrigan, Connell, and Lee (1985, 552) describe, hegemonic masculinity theory is an extension of feminist theories of patriarchy and begins from the premise that “the overall relationship between men and women is one involving domination and oppression.” That Anderson neglects this aspect of hegemonic masculinity theory is ironic in light of these authors’ further contention that “This is a fact about the social world...that is steadily evaded, and sometimes flatly denied, in much of the literature about masculinity written by men” (1985, 552).

In conclusion, O’Neill (2015, p.114) notes that Anderson (2009, p.160) is critical of academics who too often “sit in their ivory towers proclaiming what is or is not happening” in the social world. As Anderson (2009, p.160) writes: “We [academics] are stamped with a version of youth’s social world from which we experienced, and we add to this what research *traditionally* reports in order to calibrate our understanding of sex and gender. Accordingly, we look for data to confirm our view, this is something known as confirmation bias.” To this, O’Neill argues (2015, p.114): “While employing an inclusive “we,” this statement nevertheless seems to invoke a grammar of individualism” (Gill 2007, 259) as Anderson makes clear that if scholars do not or cannot replicate his findings, this is down to some personal failing on their behalf. Placing responsibility on scholars as *individuals*, Anderson effects a distinctly neoliberal, postfeminist injunction.”

O’Neill (2015, p.114-115) surmises that in proposing IMT as a new way of theorising masculinities in the modern age, Anderson is able to “locate himself at the forefront of a new, more hopeful, and optimistic era in masculinity studies—an epistemic shift that has been welcomed with a palpable sense of relief by a number of masculinity scholars, not to mention the popular press.” For O’Neill, the emergence of Anderson’s IMT is indicative of a Research Excellence Framework (REF)-led neoliberal turn in masculinities scholarships, a concern among academics with “output” and “impact,” and an academic system which recognises and, encourages, and incentivises

“newsworthy” and “media-friendly” scholarship; according to O’Neill, this had led to a general “disregard” of gender and sexual inequality and a “neglect to engage in the analysis of postfeminism” and in turn, “actively compounds the logic of postfeminism” (p.115). In a damning finale to her critique of inclusive masculinity theory, O’Neill (2015, p.116) writes:

...it is necessary to challenge discourses of easy optimism and instead pursue more complicated narratives that recognize change alongside continuity, permutation, and retrenchment. Where the analysis of postfeminism becomes an imperative of masculinity studies and scholars begin to interrogate the ways in which men and masculinities are imbricated with and implicated in postfeminism, inclusive masculinity theory may be recognized not as advancing the field, but as ceding a critical political imperative.

4.3.5 HYBRID MASCULINITIES

In the critiques discussed above, De Boise (2015, p.324), suggests that Anderson’s (2009) IMT offers a misreading of Connell’s original thesis, and that it glosses over Connell’s (1995, p.77) definition of hegemonic masculinity as a “currently accepted strategy” and hegemony as “a historically mobile relation.” Drawing on Demetriou’s (2001) notion of *hybridity* (see also Allen, 2007; Bridge and Pascoe, 2014), De Boise (2015) suggests that HMT (and its concepts of *complicit* and *marginal* masculinities) remains a useful theoretical framework for understanding gender relations, and can explain (with more nuance than IMT) how changes in gendered practice occur and how these changes might still protect privileged groups - that is, within a hegemonic and hierarchical structure. In short, Anderson’s notions of “inclusive” and “orthodox” masculinities are explainable through HMT, and can be understood within the framework Connell has spelled out.

Beyond this theoretical critique of IMT, O’Neill (2015) argues that Anderson’s inclusive masculinities framework neglects and deemphasises gendered power relations, and promotes a narrative of optimism about men, masculinities and inevitable social change toward inclusivity. Similar to De Boise (2015), O’Neill’s (2015) critique argues that IMT overlooks the complicated ways that masculinities adapt and reinforce patriarchal relations and develop new forms of gender and sexual inequality. Indeed, as noted earlier, Demetriou (2001, p.348-350) has suggested that any analysis of masculinities must take into account the adaptability of hegemonic forms of masculinity

to reconfigure itself, incorporate fragments of subordinated masculine culture into the mainstream and continue to legitimate and reproduce patriarchal values in novel ways.

What, then, to make of the rise of inclusive masculinities, the contestation of hegemonic masculinities, and the hybridization of contemporary masculinities? In his research on straight men borrowing elements of “gay” culture and framing themselves as “gay,” Bridges (2014) offers some useful thoughts in this regard. Seemingly supporting the scholarship of those working within the IMT framework, Bridges (2014) acknowledges that while homophobia has previously been identified as central to contemporary masculine identities (c.f. Connell, 1992; Kimmel, 1994; Pascoe, 2005), the practices of the men he studied “appear to challenge this relationship.” However, Bridges’ work does not support IMT; instead, drawing parallels with Messner’s (2007) theorization of an ascendant hybrid masculinity that combines “toughness” and “tenderness” but does little to challenge gender inequality, Bridges theorizes the changing masculinities he observes from a hybrid masculinities perspective: as Bridges (2014, p.59, emphasis added) writes:

Broadly speaking, straight men’s reliance on aspects of gay culture illustrates some of the ways that sexual prejudice, inequality, and the relationship between masculinity and homophobia are better understood as *transforming* than disappearing. Similar to other analyses of contemporary hybrid masculine practices, these men’s behaviour conceals privileges associated with white, heterosexual masculinity.

Thus, while Anderson (2009) and Bridges (2014) both argue for hybrid masculinities, they depart in the way they theorise the meaning of masculinities’ changing relationship with homosexuality and homophobia. Bridges (2014, p.63) notes the potential of hybrid masculinities “to challenge and/or reproduce inequality,” and suggests that: “While capable of being used to subvert gender and sexual boundaries and inequality, this shift can also work to obscure inequality in new ways by relying on an aesthetic discourse that (implicitly) disregards its existence.” In conclusion, the “gay straight” (young, white) men of Bridges (2014) have similarities with the men primarily at the centre of Anderson’s theorising. According to Bridges (2014, p.79), the move of these men toward “inclusivity” (c.f. Anderson, 2009), might be interpreted in multiple ways, and “does not necessarily indicate declining levels of gender and sexual inequality.”

Indeed, Bridges (2014, p.80) is more nuanced in his interpretation of the motivations behind and consequences of the “gay aesthetic” practices of the straight men in his study who identify with aspects of gay culture “to simultaneously assert heterosexual masculine identities, to distance themselves from stigmatizing stereotypes of masculinity, and--for some--to communicate authentic allegiance with groups to which they claim no formal membership...Using Messner’s (1993) language, these practices are illustrative of a transformation in the “style but not substance” of contemporary gender and sexual inequality.” Interrogating the social phenomenon of hybrid masculinities identified by Messner (1993, 2007), Demetriou (2001), Bridges (2014), and Anderson (2009), and unpicking new styles of “more inclusive” masculinity from their substance in terms of their impact on social inequalities, is perhaps the next challenge of contemporary research on men, masculinities, and gender relations.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have explored the theoretical landscape of gender, sexuality and masculinities, drawing on the early social constructionist thinking of Goffman (1961) and Berger and Luckmann (1966) to develop an understanding of identities as complex and rooted in social practices, and mediated by our-selves (agency) and by other people and institutions (structures). With regards to gender, I have drawn on the work of West and Zimmerman (1987), Connell (1987, 1995, 2005), Messner (1992), and Anderson (2009) among others (c.f. Demetriou, 2001; McCormack, 2012; Bridges, 2014) to lay the foundations for understanding gender relations and (hegemonic, inclusive, and hybrid) masculinities in the 21st Century. At the heart of this theoretical chapter has been the notion of inclusive masculinities proposed by Anderson (2009) as a way of understanding contemporary masculinities in a time of decreased homophobia and homophobia. Anderson’s inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) challenges Connell’s (1987, 1995) hegemonic masculinity theory (HMT), which proposes that gender relations are hierarchical, with particular masculinities dominating other subordinated and marginalised masculinities, and others being complicit to this organisation. In contrast to Connell’s HMT, Anderson’s IMT has suggested that homophobia and homophobia are much less significant in men’s lives today (also see McCormack, 2012), and this cultural change has encouraged

'inclusive' masculinities to proliferate, and allowed inclusive masculinities to challenge 'orthodox' masculinities for distinction within particular social contexts. This challenges Connell's use of hegemony theory to explain masculinities and gender-relations, where Connell (2005, p.77) noted that: "At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted." In short, Anderson (2009, p.8) contests this premise, suggesting that: "in cultures of diminished homophobia, two dominant (but not dominating) forms of masculinity will exist: One conservative and one inclusive."

While acknowledging that recent research has identified some changes in the ways that masculinities are organised, and the changing relationships between older 'more conservative' masculinities and newer 'more inclusive' masculinities (e.g. Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2012; Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010; Anderson and Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2009; Anderson and McCormack, 2015; Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Channon and Matthews, 2015; McCormack, 2012; McCormack and Anderson, 2014; Magrath, Anderson, and Roberts, 2013), I have also engaged with recent critiques of IMT on both an empirical and theoretical level (c.f. Nagel, 2010; Pringle, 2010; Martino, 2011; Vacarro, 2011; Warin, 2013; Ingram and Waller, 2014; Kehler, 2014; Negy, 2014; Parent et al., 2014; Plummer, 2014; De Boise, 2015; O'Neill, 2015). Perhaps the most robust and substantial critiques have been raised by De Boise (2015) and O'Neill (2015). Each suggested several major empirical and theoretical concerns with using IMT as a framework for understanding contemporary masculinities.

Approaching my data collection and analysis through a masculinities lens developed through a recent personal engagement in inclusive masculinity theory (e.g. Adams, 2011), I am mindful of the critiques of Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinity theory (e.g. Pringle, 2010; Ingram and Waller, 2014; De Boise, 2015; O'Neill, 2015) and recent work around the concept of hybrid masculinities (e.g. Bridges, 2014), while also welcoming of Anderson's contributions to the field. Along with Warin (2013, p.374), I also acknowledge the usefulness of "inclusive masculinity" as a way of engaging in a debate about the "forward-looking alternatives to hegemonic masculinity" and in describing young men's "openness to engage with practices that have been traditionally labelled as effeminate." In this respect, throughout my analysis, I utilise

concepts from both Connell's hegemonic masculinity theory and Anderson's inclusive masculinities theory, while also drawing on Demetriou's (2001) concept of *hybridity* (also see Bridges, 2014) to inform my own analyses, presented later in this thesis.

At the heart of the empirical chapters of this thesis is the notion that a gendered (masculine/feminine) 'self' is produced, fostered, or constructed *within* an economic, political, cultural, and social framework. In particular, in CHAPTER SIX, the economic structure of the professional football industry is central to my framing of how identities are formed in the football academy I studied. In this vein, I am also cognizant of the professional football academy as a mechanism of the wider professional football industry – what amounts to a profit-driven, hyper-neoliberalised domain – and thus I weave this economic context throughout my empirical chapter in order to texture my analysis of masculinities. In summary, I pose the following questions and explore these in my empirical chapters (CHAPTER SIX, SEVEN, EIGHT and NINE), drawing on data collected as part of my research on youth footballers in a professional football academy. What ideals and values are represented in the context of this particular professional football academy? How does the broader economic (hyper-neoliberal) atmosphere infiltrate the everyday lives of boys in this setting? Equally, how are inclusive and orthodox masculinities represented in this setting? Have new, more inclusive, masculinities been carved out in this traditionally orthodox space and is there any remaining utility in the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its vocabulary of power and dominance in describing existing gender-relations? Finally, I ask, amid the existing economic arrangements and configurations of inclusive and orthodox masculinities, what does this mean for boys' peer-relationships (and friendships) in this setting, as well as their attitudes towards homosexuality and gay athletes? In many respects, borrowing from Bridges (2014, p.80), I am therefore also concerned with whether "stylistic" changes in the relationship between masculinity and homophobia have changed (or not) the "substance" of straight masculinities; that is, whether inclusive masculinities are present, and whether they challenge the systems of inequality from which they emerge.

CHAPTER 5: METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Schwandt (1997, p.93) has described methodology in social research as “the theory of how inquiry should proceed.” Beginning from this understanding of methodology, the following chapter explains the methodological rationale for my own (ethnographic) research study. Importantly, this rationale is interlinked with the objectives of my research: (i) to explore the culture of a professional football club academy; including (ii) to develop an understanding of what ‘friendship’ means within the parameters of boys’ football academy experience, and (iii) in line with theories of gender-relations (Connell’s hegemonic masculinity theory and Anderson’s inclusive masculinities theory), to examine understandings of homosexuality among academy players. Indeed, since the overall aim of this study is to examine, interpret, and understand the social life-worlds of boys in a professional football academy and their relationships with other boys and men in this setting, this imbricates me with qualitative approaches, as opposed to quantitative approaches to research. From this perspective, this chapter outlines how data were generated (participant observations, and semi-structured interviews), and how data were organised and analysed to create the empirical findings of this thesis, presented in the three subsequent chapters. In outlining my methodology, therefore, I have structured this current chapter into three main sections: (i) an ontological and epistemological rationale for my ethnographic research approach and design (philosophical overview), (ii) how my ethnographic study was conducted (methods), and (iii) how data generated through participant observations and interviews were subsequently analysed (data analysis). This includes an in-depth practical and ethical discussion of my use of participant observations, as well as some reflections on the limitations of this thesis. At this point, however, as part of the task of explaining why I chose to utilise ethnographic methods in this research, I begin this chapter with a discussion of research philosophy and an overview of the “schools of thought” in social science research.

5.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

5.2.1 “SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT” IN SOCIAL RESEARCH

Outlining the structure of the social sciences, Bulmer (1984, p.xi) has suggested that the interplay between theory and empirical evidence is vital in developing social understanding: “One without the other,” he writes, “is barren.” Bulmer goes on to note that the interwoven nature of these two components of social research is “maintained and kept standing solid” by *methodology*. “Broadly conceived,” writes Bulmer (1984, p.xi), “research methodology deals with the general grounds for the validity of social research:” In this vein, Bulmer suggests, methodology prompts the following philosophical questions:

How do we know what we do know about the social world? More narrowly...how do we actually acquire new knowledge about the world in which we live? What are the strategies and techniques by means of which social science data are collected and analysed?

(Bulmer, 1984, p.ix)

Embedded in these philosophical questions are complex (ontological) questions about the nature of reality, knowledge, meaning, the relationships between objectivity and subjectivity; questions that inform (epistemological) discussions about the techniques and strategies (methods) chosen in this current study. Below, I interrogate these questions in order to pave the way toward outlining a rationale for the ways in which I have studied the experiences of boys in a professional football academy.

5.2.2 ONTOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: BELIEFS ABOUT THE NATURE OF REALITY

According to Preissle and Grant (2004), borrowing from the work of Crotty (1999), all researchers approach their research with divergent beliefs about the nature of reality, and how this reality can be captured or represented. Drawing inferences from the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous chapter (social constructionist perspectives on masculinities and gender-relations), as well as the intermittent references throughout this thesis so far in relation to *examining*, *interpreting*, and *understanding* the *meanings* of individuals’ *subjective* experiences of *social life-worlds* within which they simultaneously think and act as self-conscious actors to shape their social worlds within historically-located, social, cultural, political and economic institutions soaked through with pre-existing values, ideals, and meaning structures

(c.f. Goffman, 1961; Berger and Luckmann, 1966), it may already be clear that this research study begins from a research position that aligns with a view of the social world as animated and shaped by a variety of *relations* and *processes*.

That I have begun this research study from this particular *ontological* perspective about what constitutes reality and knowledge in social science research is something I hope to have already established implicitly through my introduction and literature review chapters (CHAPTER ONE, TWO and THREE) and theoretical discussion (CHAPTER FOUR) of fluid, changing, and dynamic *systems*, *processes*, and *relations* of gender (c.f. West and Zimmerman, 1987; Connell, 1987, 1995, 2005; Anderson, 2009). However, to state my perspective explicitly, borrowing from May (1993, p.4-8), my perspective in this research contrasts the *positivist* (or *empiricist*) ‘hard-science’ school of thought of social science, typically adapted from the work of physics, chemistry, or physiology, that there are universal ‘truths’ about human nature that are ‘out there’ to be ‘discovered.’ From a positivist ontological perspective, as May (1993, p.4) sets out, it is believed that scientists can devise, control and adapt experiments in laboratories to “test” and “measure” the parameters of social life; that is, that social life can be *objectively* measured and explained *independent* of how individuals might interpret their experiences, and that these “truths” or “laws” can be used to predict individual behaviours.

Contrary to this perspective, notes May (1993, p.8), is one that positions the unstable, internally-configured, and variable *subjective* experiences of the individual at the heart of any search for ‘truth;’ from this subjective *interpretivist* viewpoint, the aim then, is to locate the individual as a conscious “thinking and acting” being with an “inner world of experiences.” Within this philosophical framework of what constitutes ‘science’ and how/if ‘truths’ can be reached, is the idea that individual human beings accumulate particular (socially-constructed) knowledge relative to the niches of each social world they live in, and they use this knowledge in multiple and varied ways to interpret their social world, act upon it, and attach meanings to their lived-experiences, *inter-subjectively*, that is, *always* in relation to the knowledge, interpretations, actions, and experiences of others (c.f. Goffman, 1961; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Importantly, as May (1993, p.8) explains:

To speak of cause (heating of molecules, for example) and effect (excitement of molecules) is not applicable to researching social life, for people, unlike molecules, contemplate, interpret and act within their environments. For these reasons, the methods of the social sciences are fundamentally different from, but *not* inferior to, the natural sciences. It is the world of ideas in which we are interested as social researchers.

5.2.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: HOW TO BUILD KNOWLEDGE ABOUT REALITY

Ontological stances about the nature of reality are logically linked to epistemological questions about how social researchers can build knowledge about this reality. Put differently, because (as May, 1993, suggests above) sociology is different from the natural sciences, it requires a particular logic of procedure. In this regard, epistemological choices about what inquiry approaches are most suitable for sociological research are framed and guided by how social researchers conceptualise what constitutes 'reality' and 'knowledge.' As Preissle and Grant (2004, p.171) write:

Determining how we approach the knowing of reality involves making assumptions about the making of meaning. How objective or subjective are meanings, and what is the role of the self in meaning making? How much should self (versus other) be foregrounded in the research process and especially in the final account?

Having established my own ontological perspective, below I follow this ontological stance towards its logical epistemological stance, tending to Preissle and Grant's questions, from which philosophical position I self-consciously connect myself with and select a particular approach to research including suitable methods (i.e. strategies and techniques) for researching boys in a football academy.

Since my aim in this study is to examine, interpret, and understand some of the underlying mechanisms of the social life-world of the academy footballer as well as the multitude of *meanings* they attribute to their experiences of 'being' academy footballers, this perspective on research precludes me from particular research approaches. Put differently, by virtue of my ontological perspective, since I seek to explore some of the underlying conditions that *make possible* the everyday lived-experiences of boys in professional football academy as well as the ways these individuals refer to their 'inner' world of experiences, I have found myself to be oriented away from objectivist research approaches that favour quantitative methods aligned

with empiricist or positivist research perspectives, since these methods, as May (1993) has noted, only allow the researcher to collect observations on the social world, that is, to *reflect* the everyday world.

Moreover, sharing objections to positivist-realist claims that life has a single, stable, “concrete reality, one that is uniform and that exists beyond the minds of researchers” (Preissle and Grant, 2004, p.167), I am drawn to research perspectives, approaches, and methods in which attempts can be made to acknowledge, apprehend, and account for the standpoint of the researcher, and what part their values, ideals, and world-views (researcher *subjectivities*) have played in the construction and representation of reality and knowledge. According to Preissle and Grant (2004) this positions me within the ‘idealist’ tradition of research philosophy. However, acknowledging also, as Crotty (1999) does, that material worlds *may* exist apart from human consciousness, but that meanings constructed about this material world are the product of interactions between human minds, I position myself at this point pragmatically between realist (objectivist) and idealist (subjectivist) perspectives and approaches, within a *constructionist* view of knowledge production. Pulling gently at the thread of this perspective, unravelling the interwoven connection between reality-knowledge, theory, and evidence, logically leads me toward weave an approach to research in which “Subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning” (Crotty, 1999, p.9).

In outlining my own methodological journey, I am therefore mindful of Kramp’s (2004, p.105) observation that, historically, the task of *assigning value to context* in social science research has been the realm of qualitative researchers. Indeed, Kramp notes that qualitative research has been useful in developing an understanding of individuals’ thoughts and actions as *meaningful* and “embedded in context,” and that exploring the context within which behaviours, events and actions take place can allow social science researchers to “make meaning where previously there was no meaning.” Thus, as a way of knowing, that is, a set of methods for creating knowledge about the social world, Kramp is clear to suggest that qualitative inquiry enables researchers to link individual actions, perceptions and experiences with broader social contexts. For C. Wright Mills (1959), this was something he called the “promise of sociology:” meaning

that for sociological inquiry to live up to its potential, it must seek to link personal problems (experience) with social issues (context).

In summary, acknowledging that the challenge of the sociologist is “to develop a deep understanding of the empirical social world we live in through whatever routes this can be achieved best” (Plummer, 2010, p.97), an interrogation of my own beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge has led to me logically locating myself within (i) an ontological tradition of interpretivism (as opposed to positivism), and (ii) an epistemological stance of subjectivism/constructionism (as opposed to objectivism). Following this logic further, in order to achieve my philosophical aim of generating knowledge regarding people and their relationships with others that offers an empathic *understanding*, beyond description and explanation of human behaviour, I am inclined toward adopting a *qualitative* methodological approach. Next, I seek to outline and justify the particular qualitative approach and techniques I have selected to best achieve an illumination of the sociological problem at hand.

5.3 QUALITATIVE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

Burgess (1984) points out that where philosophical and theoretical perspectives have oriented social researchers toward elucidating the *meaning* of social situations – the ways in which different people experience, interpret and structure their lives – these researchers have developed approaches and methods of investigation to enable them to achieve these aims. For this task, as Burgess observes (*ibid*, p.2), an approach to research known as *qualitative research* has developed into the favoured research approach of many social researchers who want to “focus on the social world at first hand” and “get close to the data” in order to develop their interpretations.

Indeed, a multitude of qualitative methods (e.g. participant observation, unstructured or semi-structured interviews, and the use of personal or written documents) have consistently and meaningfully been deployed in recent years to study a variety of issues relating to youth, gender and professional sport. Brown and Potrac (2009, p.145), for example, used in-depth biographical interviews as a way to open up “a window to a culture” and to “invite readers to emotionally ‘relive’ the respondents stories about their deselection from professional football.” Clayton and Humberstone

(2006) utilised a combination of participant observation to analyse the naturally-occurring talk of men on a university football team, which they then followed up with semi-structured interviews, while Cushion and Jones (2006) have utilised a similar *ethnographic* approach (combining individual interviews and participant observations) to collect data on the nature of coaching practices in English professional youth soccer (18-19 year old players) over the course of 10-months. Similar qualitative approaches have also been utilised in educational contexts (see for example the work of Parker, 1996; Pascoe, 2003; Renold, 1997; Skelton, 1997; Swain, 2000; 2003 2006).

Acknowledging the richness of data that researchers utilising qualitative methods have been able to generate, an 'ethnographic' approach in particular has emerged, for me, as perhaps the most potentially illuminating method, given the empirical and philosophical basis of my own study. In the following sections I discuss why I favoured this approach. Furthermore, I will discuss the advantages of utilising an ethnographic approach, as well as how interviews can fit into ethnography.

5.3.1 ETHNOGRAPHY: THE CRAFT OF DESCRIBING CULTURE

Ethnography has been described by Spradley (1979, p.3) as "the work of describing culture." For D'Andrade (1976, p.179) the spirit of ethnographic research is all about immersing oneself in the studied culture "as deeply as possible." For those researchers seeking to undertake in-depth studies of a cultural belief system, D'Andrade (1976) suggests that ethnography is perhaps the most effective technique and offers the richness of data that qualitative researchers are looking for. Described as the 'anthropological method' or 'ethnography,' the task of ethnographers is to immerse themselves in, observe, study, and describe group (sub)culture. Growing out of the anthropological tradition and the study of non-western 'native' societies by such early anthropologists as Franz Boaz, Margaret Mead, Clifford Geertz, and Bronislaw Malinowski, ethnographic methods have become a valuable strategy among many social researchers.

The craft of ethnography, therefore, has a rich history in the social sciences and, in recent years, as Srivastava (2004) has pointed out, ethnographic methods have increasingly been adopted for the task of studying one's own culture. Parker's (2001) ethnography of 16-19 year old professional football trainees, Clayton and Harris'

(2008) research on alcohol, friendships and masculinity in a university football team, and Cushion and Jones' (2006) study of coach-athlete interactions in the context of a professional football club youth team (16-19 year olds) provide some fine examples of the deployment of ethnographic methods of data collection (participants observations and interviews) and the craft of ethnography in the study of football settings. It is studies such as these that I have drawn on in the design of my own ethnographic research, both previously (e.g. Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010; Adams, 2011) and currently in this thesis.

5.3.2 DEGREES OF ETHNOGRAPHY

Importantly, it must be noted that there is not *one* ethnographic method. Put differently, not all ethnographic studies in the social sciences are conducted in the same way, and different researchers will emphasize that successful ethnographic projects will require various degrees of 'distance' and 'closeness.' Researchers decisions about how to conduct ethnographic research will therefore be closely tied to epistemological, practical, and ethical stances and concerns, which may overlap. In this regard, while some, such as Salisbury (1976), have emphasized researcher *distance*, others, such as Nelson (1969) and Ellen (1984), have encouraged ethnographic researchers to engage in what they have described as *subjective soaking*, participating *fully* in the setting, in order to better internalise and thus more easily document the activities of the researcher.

Interestingly in the context of my own research from an 'insider' position, Agar (1980) has pointed out that one of the major limitations to conducting ethnography is when the researcher is perceived as a stranger or outsider by those within the social setting being studied. Also commenting on the difficulties that await 'outsider' researchers, Johnson, Avenarius and Weatherford (2006, p.113) note that: "Access to information can be severely limited because of this outsider's status, and the success or failure of a project may hinge on the ethnographer's ability to de-emphasize such status." Social researchers conducting observational research, therefore, must think about how the position from which they begin research will affect the 'success' of their research; that is, how beginning from an 'outsider' position or an 'insider' position might benefit or hinder their own research.

Adding another layer of complexity to observational research on top of the insider-outsider dichotomy is the 'degree of participation' that social researchers might adopt once they are in the field. In this regard, Gold's (1958) classic typology box distinguishing between levels of researcher participation and 'self' involvement is helpful. Beginning with the position involving the least level of participation, Gold (1958), extending the work of Junker (1952), described four potential researcher roles: (i) the 'complete-observer,' (ii) the 'observer-as-participant,' (iii) the 'participant-as-observer,' and (iv) the 'complete-participant.' At one end of the spectrum, therefore, is the complete-observer, and at the other end (involving the greatest level of participation) is the complete-participant. In the complete-participant role, Gold (1958, p.219) points out that: "The true identity and purpose of the complete participant in field research are not known to those whom he observes." Moreover, outlining the complete-participant role further, Gold (1958, p.219) writes that the complete-participant researcher "interacts with them [participants] as naturally as possible in whatever areas of their living interest him and are accessible to him as situations in which he can play, or learn to play, requisite day-to-day roles successfully." Adler and Adler (1987) also provide a useful discussion of levels of researcher integration into the field setting, similarly typologising 'complete,' 'active,' and 'peripheral' membership roles, while Johnson et al. (2006) nuance this discussion further by highlighting subtleties in levels of interaction with participants within each of these roles, where, for example, Adler and Adler's (1987) 'active participation' role might be deconstructed into 'passive active participation' and 'active active participation.'

Drawing on these perspectives of researcher position, role and 'self' involvement in the research process, therefore, I position myself more towards Gold's (1958) 'complete-participant' role and between Adler and Adler's (1987) 'complete' and 'active' researcher positions. As a practicing academy coach in this setting, I was a complete-participant, although I do acknowledge that I was participating as a *coach*, and not as an academy footballer. Thus, at times my researcher position while engaging in complete-participant observation could perhaps be conceived as that of 'active-participant-observer' (although I acknowledge that Gold's participant-as-observer is a research position in which the field worker and the informant are aware that their relationship is a field relationship – see Gold, 1958, p.220). As an adult, male, former-

coach of these boys, the way in which I was viewed by boys during interviews would likely have fluctuated, too; between 'researcher', 'coach', and 'adult.' As a former academy footballer and academy coach I could draw on the shared 'insider' experiences of West-Side academy, although I recognise that as an adult at the time when the data was collected I am an 'outsider' as far as these particular boys' own lived experiences are concerned.

5.3.3 RESEARCHER REFLEXIVITY

In light of what has been discussed so far, it is clear that for the modern ethnographer a number of methodological options are available when undertaking observational research and ethnography. Each researcher role and subjective position of the researcher may have its own merits depending on the philosophical and practical aims and needs of the researcher. As Merton (1972, p.585) notes pragmatically: "...the perspectives of both outsider and insider reveal "certain truths."...Each perspective has its advantages and disadvantages, both intellectual and practical." Summarizing this debate, Hammersley (1993, p.219) writes:

In short, I do not believe that being an established participant in a situation provides access to valid knowledge that is not available to an outside researcher. In general, the chances of findings being valid can be enhanced by a judicious combination of involvement and estrangement. However, no position, not even a marginal one guarantees valid knowledge; and no position prevents it either. There are no overwhelming advantages to being an insider or an outsider. Each position has advantages and disadvantages, though these will take on slightly different weights depending on the particular circumstances and purposes of the research.

However, while Hammersley (1993) argues that there are "no overwhelming advantages" to either an insider or outsider position, I point to the work of Holdaway (1977), for example, on masculinity and racism in the British Police, and ask whether an outsider would have been able to generate the same data. In this regard, it is perhaps more useful for researchers to focus, as Hellowell (2006) suggests, on where they are positioned along the insider-outsider continuum and to reflect on this position throughout their research. Developing a consciousness about the role the researcher's position, beliefs, and values play in the production of data, and how this affects the presentation of data in the final research account, is something Shacklock and Smyth (1998) have described as *reflexivity*. Cognizant of Hellowell's (2006, p.483) suggestion

that reflecting on one's position on the insider-outsider continuum can protect against the pitfalls of over-involvement or estrangement, I have sought to integrate reflexivity into my own research through an on-going process of deliberate self-scrutiny and an active attempt to 'stand outside' my own writing, and to reflect on my own 'relation' to it.

A reflexive approach to research (including drawing on the reflections of supervisors and colleagues in questioning my 'self' involvement in the research process) is something I have sought to integrate into my empirical chapters where appropriate and useful to enhancing understanding of the research setting, and this reflexivity is something I also highlight in the following sections outlining the methods I used. Thus, having discussed the philosophical underpinnings of my research methodology, I move on to outline the context in which my own PhD research takes place, and the ethnographic methods (participant observation and interviews) I have utilised to conduct this research.

5.4 METHODS

5.4.1 CONTEXT AND ACCESS

Ethical approval to conduct this research was sought and granted by the University of Bath's Ethics Committee. This research focuses on the youth academy of one professional football club, which I have given the name West-Side Football Club. For much of its recent history, West-Side Football Club has operated in the lower tiers of the English "Football League" pyramid¹³. West-Side provides a structured training programme ('academy') from Under-9s (U9s) through to Under-18s (U18s), with the goal of developing boys capable of entering into the professional game at the age of eighteen. Put differently, at the age of eighteen, professional (salaried) contracts may be distributed to those young men the club deems to be capable of contributing to the

¹³ In England, 92 professional clubs are structured into four leagues: The Premier League; The Championship; League One, and; League Two. However, the organisation of football in England also supports a number of other "professional" clubs further down the "pyramid" structure, in what is known as the "semi-pro" game (that is, they pay their players a weekly wage). Below League Two there is one national semi-pro league (The Conference), and then below this the pyramid structure starts to regionalise into North and South, gradually becoming more localised and regional the further down the pyramid one goes.

success of the ‘first team’ (the adult professional men’s team competing in the Football League). In this respect, (youth) players can be viewed as (prospective) financial assets to the club, and will either help the team to achieve success on the field, or will be sold to other clubs for profit. Individuals who are perceived as not helpful in these aims will likely be ‘released’ from their contracts; that is, to borrow from the article title of Potrac and Brown’s (2006) research on youth footballers, they will be told they have ‘not made the grade.’

With regards to accessing this research site, West-Side was chosen for this ethnographic research for pragmatic reasons and convenience of access. As Leedy and Ormerod (2005, p.137) have noted, for example, “...the first step in an ethnographic study is to gain access to a site appropriate for answering the researcher’s general research problem or question.” Put differently, Berg (2007, p.175) writes that: “All ethnography begins with the problem of *getting-in*.” While issues of access are at the forefront of ethnographic research, particularly in the closed-world of professional football, I began this research from the position of an already-embedded academy coach at this football club. While most research is initially designed from a top-down perspective (c.f. Israel and Hay, 2006), where a person ‘becomes’ a sociologist through intensive full-time training then leaves the university setting, skilled in social science theory and method, and enters into a field setting to study the lives of the ‘natives’, later returning to the university to report their findings (the classical anthropological method of sociologist-as-native), my own research is therefore somewhat of a reversal of the conventional process by which people ‘become’ social researchers.

I began this research already on the ‘inside’ of the research setting. However, while this approach allowed for easier access to the research setting, it also raised personal questions about the unification of a formative life experience with a sociological perspective (c.f. Heilman, 1980), and, as Robert (1976, p.17 – cited in Heilman, 1980, p.102) has touched upon, the extent to which being somewhat ‘native’ to the setting (i.e. as a former youth footballer and current academy coach) both facilitated and impeded my own nuanced understanding of “the thousand nothings that are said and done mechanically in every moment of daily life” within West-Side Academy. Merton

(1972) has also discussed the issues in terms of 'insider' and 'outsider' researcher position.

Making sense of the discussions of the likes of Heilman (1980), Robert (1976), and Merton (1972) within the context of my own research experience, I recognise that while beginning this study from an 'insider' position (as an academy coach at West-Side) provided a number of benefits (discussed in more details this chapter), I also benefitted from a number of 'outsider' influences, too. For example, while occupying a role as an academy coach, I benefitted from the outsider status of my past and present supervisory team. As an academic who is critical of sport, Professor Eric Anderson's lectures, research papers, and advice on my Master's dissertation helped me to see football academies in a different light than I had done as a youth footballer and later as an academy coach. There were also times when the outsider status of both Dr. Tina Skinner and Dr. Nicola Ingram (as women not actively involved in professional sports nor familiar with the academic literature on professional football academies) helped me to think through my data differently. Moreover, I also checked some of my ideas with the boys themselves to ensure that my analyses were not too closely centred on my own experience. The discussions I have had with supervisors, among other academics, as well as participants, who each maintained different distances and perspectives on what was 'going on' in the data, may have helped to give me the necessary checks and reassurances in my data analysis. This made a substantial difference to my final analysis and conclusions.

Data for this study were generated utilising an ethnographic framework that included (initially covert) participant observation (while working as an academy coach at West-Side) and, subsequently, (overt) in-depth interviews (after leaving my role as coach in this academy). Thus, the ordering of methods went like this: covert participant observations (consent sought from children and parents after the observation), overt interviews (consent obtained for interviews). The aim of this strategy (incorporating post-study retrospective consent for observation data) was to use my existing immersion in the setting (as an employed coach) to study its social practices and culture as deeply as possible. Participant observations, therefore, took place before, during, and after training sessions (two evenings per week for 2 hours) at the academy

facility – this was an educational facility rented by the football club – and at fixtures/games against other professional football club academies (generally on Sunday mornings) over a period of eighteen months between January 2011 and June 2012. My coach-as-researcher role was a way to make observations primarily focused on the group of (Under-14) boys (n=15) I was coaching. All-in-all, this entailed over 400 hours of observation in the setting.

Building on the overview of research philosophy that I have already set out in this methodology chapter, in the following sections I outline the ethnographic approach I took with each method selected as a way of generating rich, meaning-laden data on boys' (and men's, including coaches) relationship with masculinity within the football academy context. Each method is discussed in terms of the purpose of its use, issues of access and sampling, ethical considerations and informed consent, and the practicalities of its design and implementation.

5.4.2 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATIONS

In the first part of my research, data were generated utilising the method of participant observation. Observations were made from the position of embedded academy coach in a number of settings at West-Side including; training sessions, game days, on the team bus while travelling to away fixtures, parent-player meetings, and coaches meetings. Making field notes in this setting proved to be relatively simple, in that I always had a pen and notepad to hand as part of my role as a coach. At appropriate breaks in a training session, for example, it was easy to make notes that I could then add to before I would drive home, and then 'write up' more fully upon getting home that evening. It is important to note from the outset of this discussion that, while *institutional* consent was attained from a key stakeholder at West-Side (the academy manager), those participating as players and coaches were not informed that I was conducting social research: at this point, I was conducting *covert* research, and I simply went about my everyday role as an academy coach, and began to record my observations of player and coach interactions that I felt might prove meaningful later on. Later, once observations were complete, I sought retrospective consent (in the form of opt-out forms) from participants to use this observation data in my final accounts.

Acknowledging the richness of sociological knowledge that has been derived from research in which the identity of the observer as a social researcher remains unknown to those being studied¹⁴, yet conscious of its divisiveness in the social sciences and the practical, ethical, and moral objections to its use¹⁵, in the following sections I explore some of the problems with the outright dismissal and condemnation of 'covert methods',¹⁶ examine the line between overt and covert research (e.g. Lugosi, 2006), problematise the ideologies of informed consent and voluntary participation (e.g. Corrigan, 2003), contest the depiction of covert research as *always* and *inherently* 'deceptive,' and engage with a 'situational' perspective of ethical conduct in social research (c.f. Calvey, 2008; Spicker, 2011; Goode, 1996), through which 'ethical covert research' strategies (c.f. Spicker, 2011) can be developed. Indeed, a number of scholars whom I draw upon in this discussion (e.g. Goode, 1996; Calvey, 2000; Lauder, 2003; Lugosi, 2006; Spicker, 2011; Denzin and Erikson, 1982; Miller and Tewksbury, 2010; Pearson, 2009) have advocated for 'covert' research to be (re)considered legitimate and ethical, and for covert methods to be accepted as a useful, powerful, and sometimes *necessary* tool of the modern ethnographer.

At the heart of the following sections, then, is an attempt to engage with Spicker's (2011, p.128) call for social researchers (thinking about) utilising covert research to distinguish between 'covert' research and 'deception,' and to engage with the ethical principles of social research to examine the ethics of one's own research "in the context where the research is done" rather than undertaking an "automatic application of programmatic rules." Spicker (2011) makes a case that covert methods *can* be deployed ethically, and should therefore not be dismissed or condemned so swiftly by

¹⁴ Caudhill et al.'s (1952) study of psychiatric hospitals; Festinger et al.'s (1956) study of a religious group who believed the world was coming to an end; Goffman's (1961) study of asylums and institutionalization; Humphrey's (1970) tearoom trade study of men who engaged in same-sex sexual acts in a public restroom; Rosenhan's (1973) use of pseudo-patients to study the labelling process in psychiatry; Becker's (1963) study of musicians from 1948-49; and Polsky's (1969) study of poolroom hustling, carried out over eight months in 1962-63.

¹⁵ Joan Cassell (1982, p.18-19) has written that covert methods are "methodologically and morally questionable," and that those researchers who use such techniques and methods should "not call themselves social scientists." Moreover, corroborating what is arguably still the dominant position on covert methods today, Elms (1994, p.122) has concluded that there are "no circumstances under which the use of deception is ethically permissible in a scientific study."

¹⁶ Erikson (1967, p.373) describes covert research as research in which the sociologist attempts to "*deliberately misrepresent* his [or her] identity for the purpose of entering a private domain to *which he* [or she] *is not otherwise eligible*."

social researchers without a considered engagement with ethical principles and one's own research context. With this in mind, I now move onto a discussion of the key practical, ethical, and moral objections to covert research, toward an understanding of their applicability to my own research situation.

5.4.2.1 KEY OBJECTIONS TO COVERT OBSERVATION RESEARCH

Concerns with covert research have routinely been acknowledged by a number of other scholars (e.g. Erikson, 1967; Elms, 1992; Shils, 1982; Cassell, 1980; Herrera, 1999). Indeed, the central theme among critics of covert research appears to be an ethical discomfort with the level of 'deception' that is engaged in, with covert research widely being described and condemned as intrinsically deceptive, since it infringes on the moral rights of the research subject by invading their privacy, violating the principle of informed consent, and (potentially) putting them at risk of physical and/or psychological harm.

In a review and discussion of the possibilities of conducting *ethical* covert research, Spicker (2011) dismantles many of the objections made to covert research, noting (p.119) that: "Many of the objections which are made to covert research are objections to deception rather than covert activity": covert research being *when research is not declared to participants*, and deception being *when researchers say they are doing one thing when they are doing another*.¹⁷ This is a *critical* distinction, notes Spicker (2011), and one that is often swept away in the moralistic and reactive, knee-jerk arguments of those who are critical of covert methods. Moreover, Spicker (ibid, p.20) notes that: "The widespread confusion between deception and covert activity means, unfortunately, that a conventional literature review does little to clarify the ethical issues." Indeed, attesting to the voracity with which critics attack the 'deception' they view as inherent in covert research, Spicker (2011) notes that of Homan's (1991) list of thirteen (13) key objections to 'covert research,' six are objections to 'deception,' with three other objections being about the practical 'effectiveness' of covert methods, and the other four objections being concerned with (i) informed consent, (ii) personal liberty, (iii) damage to the behaviour or interests of subjects, and (iv) discrimination against the defenceless and powerless; that is, essentially the "personal rights of the

¹⁷ Spicker notes that a classic example of deception in social research is Milgram's (1974) shock experiments.

research subject” (i.e. their rights to privacy, autonomy, and safety from harm). On the objections to covert research, Spicker (2011, p.129) concludes that:

The kind of issue that the literature focuses on most clearly is a special case: the use of covert participant observation, or ‘undercover’ work, where researchers either pretend to be something different...or become something different...There are many problems with this kind of research, but its covert nature is the least of them.

Finally, Spicker (2011, p.129) adds: “If covert participant observation is undertaken in a legitimate public setting, without deception...there is nothing evidently wrong with it.”

In light of these objections to covert research, therefore, and for the purposes of discussing key objections to covert research in the context of my own study, I have attempted to collapse the multiple and varied (and often overlapping) practical, methodological, ethical and moral objections into three important considerations: (i) the practical problem of observation, (ii) participants’ rights and informed consent, and (iii) risk and harm.

5.4.2.2 THE PRACTICAL PROBLEM OF OBSERVATION

There are different ways of trying to deal with the problem [of the Hawthorne Effect], but if the objective of a study calls for observation of people’s behaviour in a particular context, the research has to minimize the effect of the process of observation on the way that people behave. Limiting disclosure by the researcher is the obvious way to counter that problem.

(Spicker, 2011, p.120)

Miller and Tewksbury (2010, p.493) note that one of the most fundamental problems facing observational researchers is the challenge of “fitting in,” so as not to “significantly alter activity over time and, ideally, not affect behaviour any longer than would any new group member.” This phenomenon is widely known in the social sciences as the Hawthorne Effect and this principle of observation studies states that participants in the field may change their behaviour (e.g. ways of talking and responding) when they know they are being watched. In this regard, the utility of covert research in overcoming the methodological problem of observation in social research is something widely acknowledged in the methods debates (c.f. Miller and Tewksbury, 2010; Bulmer, 1980; 1982; Cassell, 1980; Homan, 1980; Pearson, 2009; Berg 2007; Goode, 1996; Calvey, 2008). I contend that it might also supplement recent research on men and (inclusive) masculinities (c.f. De Boise, 2015; O’Neill, 2015) in which observations of men’s

(homosocial) behaviour has been conducted *overtly* (e.g. Adams, 2011; Adams and Anderson, 2012; Anderson and Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2009; McCormack, 2012) as well through in-depth interview and large-scale survey approaches (e.g. Cashmore and Cleland, 2012; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2013).

However, as Miller and Tewksbury (2010) have observed, ethical codes and regulations, and the moralising atmosphere they create potentially close down opportunities for naturalism in (participant) observation studies. Field research subsequently becomes 'guided' away from covert strategies toward overt, open strategies, inviting a Hawthorne Effect. As a result of this, Miller and Tewksbury (2010) point out that qualitative approaches and particularly 'alternative' qualitative methods in which researchers seek to involve themselves deeply in the study environment and engage in intense interaction with human subjects are squeezed to the edges of what is acceptable in the social sciences, and branded as 'extreme.' Arguably, the gradual increases in regulation of social science research since the 1960s and 1970s (c.f. Cassell, 1980; Haggerty, 2004), has resulted in the oppression of particular forms of subjectivist/interpretivist academic inquiry, at the same time as reducing the likelihood of ethically problematic research.

As well as facing cultural and bureaucratic difficulties in bringing covert research to life, researchers seeking to utilise covert methods face other practical problems. Rafferty (2004, p.128), for example, has noted that "sustaining a role – that is, remembering the details of a fabricated life – is not easy." Rafferty's comments highlight how the duality of the (participant) observer's role, that is, engaging deeply in the social world of participants *and* retaining a level of sociological detachment (apparently necessary for 'objectivity'), can be a challenging task. As I have noted earlier, however, in my role of coach-as-researcher I was able to circumvent the issue of access that is so tricky for many ethnographers; moreover, since I was already embedded in the study setting sustaining a 'fabricated life' was not necessary. I was simply continuing to be myself.

Part of my decision-making not to seek consent for observations immediately (and to wait until data collection was complete before seeking consent) was the fact that the observational role and research process that I was engaged in was only available due

to my background and experience in the study setting, which aligned with my research interests: drawing similarities with previous classic ‘native-to-sociologist’ ethnographic work (e.g. Heilman, 1980; Holdaway, 1977; Homan, 1978; Becker, 1963; Polsky, 1969). Put differently, to become an ingrained football coach in the youth academy of professional football clubs took many years to accomplish (I began my coaching ‘career’ at eighteen years old and began this PhD research aged twenty-six). This matriculation into the world of professional football academies took thousands of hours coaching and a great deal of financial investment to obtain the necessary qualifications. Clearly, the opportunities for trained social researchers to undergo similar vocational training in order to access this study setting and engage in a similar research process are limited. I doubt many have the time, nor the motivation. In addition, I presume that the number of academy football coaches who undergo on-the-job training to become sociologists and then utilise their academy coaching positions for research purposes will be rare: meaning that little ethnographic insider research (covert or overt) is done on football academies.

In summary, I contend that straddling the divide between the football ‘academy’ and the academic ‘academie’ offered me a unique vantage point from which to conduct naturalistic social research. To overcome *the* practical problem of observation studies – that is, to reduce the Hawthorne Effect – I opted not to seek consent from participants at the stage of beginning observations. In this regard, I was of the view that seeking full and open pre-study consent would disturb the setting and so I was in agreement with Crow et al. (2006, p.91) who note that: “the quality of data collected suffers as a result of the practical arrangements for gaining consent.” Therefore, at this point I viewed the process of obtaining consent as methodologically impractical and disruptive and went ahead with making observations covertly, with a plan to seek consent ‘retrospectively;’ that is, once the observations period was complete. Ethically, I decided that it would not, however, be justifiable to conduct this research without gaining consent *at any point*. I therefore deliberated to seek consent later, through an information letter outlining the aims of the study and my findings, and giving participants an opportunity to ‘opt-out’ of being included in any of the observations included in my final written accounts of West-Side academy. The ethicality of this process, that is, of limiting disclosure about my research to participants/subjects in the

formative stages, is something I take up in more detail in the following section. While I *did* gain consent *in the end*, this discussion is nonetheless illuminating.

5.4.2.3 PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS AND INFORMED CONSENT

Israel and Hay (2006) have noted that most research ethics guidelines require researchers to inform participants of their research *before* they begin, and that participation in research should be 'voluntary.' Participants should typically understand the motives of the researcher, and from this informed position should be allowed to make a choice about whether or not they participate, and how long they participate for. A number of scholars have noted (e.g. Cassell, 1980; Israel and Hay, 2006; Haggerty, 2004; Spicker, 2011) that these principles, derived and adapted from early bio-medical models of ethics¹⁸ to protect human subjects from abuse have more recently been extended into the social sciences as part of an increasingly rigid one-size-fits-all regulation of research. Generally known among social scientists as (i) the right to privacy, (ii) the right to informed consent, and (iii) the right to withdraw, Spicker (2011, p.125, emphasis added) points out that in today's world of social research, "These principles are commonly translated into a presumption that consent must *always* be obtained for research to be legitimate."

The core ethical argument against covert research, therefore, is that it violates established ethical principles; that is, it infringes on the personal rights of the research subject, and so erodes their personal liberty (c.f. Homan, 1991; Erikson, 1967; Shils, 1982). Summarising the problem of covert research and consent Spicker (2011, p.123) writes:

If research is covert, people are not informed, they are not able to consent, and they cannot effectively withdraw...That, in a nutshell, is the principal ethical objection to covert research in practice.

In not disclosing my research to participants/subjects at the start of the observation, therefore, others will likely argue that I have broken ethical codes; and in a research climate in which 'being ethical' tends to mean 'following the rules' (c.f. Haggerty, 2004),

¹⁸ See, for example, the Nuremberg Code (1947)

my use of covert observations (despite later gaining consent and the lack of harm caused¹⁹) may be thought of by some as inherently 'unethical.'

Providing a supportive viewpoint for the line I have taken on consent, Berg (2007, p.63) notes that when making judgements about the ethicality of research, it is important to recognise that the relationship between researcher and subject/participant in qualitative research is (potentially) far more difficult and challenging than in quantitative research; that is, relationships in qualitative research are frequently ongoing, evolving, with observations of (and often participation *in*) the lives of subjects, wherein the content of the relationship is constantly negotiated, agreed, and regulated. For Berg (2007), among others (e.g. Spicker, 2011), therefore, the research relationship between researcher and subject in the social sciences (with qualitative research at one end of the 'scientific' spectrum) is far-removed from the same relationship that takes place in the bio-medical sciences (with quantitative research at the other end of the spectrum)²⁰.

Taking a similar line of reasoning, a number of researchers (e.g. Haggerty, 2004; Becker, 2004; Spicker, 2011; Calvey, 2008; Goode, 1996; Lugosi, 2006; Cassell, 1980; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, 2003; Miller and Tewksbury, 2010) have argued that the bio-medical 'colonisation' of social science ethics has gone too far. In the sense that I have taken account of the qualitative researcher/participant relationship in making decisions around consent and rights, I align myself with these scholars who contest the 'erosion of liberty' ethical argument and instead argue that the increasingly 'programmatic' demand for informed consent under one universal canopy of 'research ethics' makes little sense and ultimately amounts to little more than an impractical and unhelpful consent-form 'ritualism' (c.f. Sin, 2005) as well as a general trend toward 'unthinking' and absolutist 'empty ethics' (c.f. Corrigan, 2003). In this vein, I also draw upon Haggerty (2004, p.405), who points out that:

One of the paradoxes of the formal research ethics system is that there is often a distinct but unquestioned rupture between following the rules and conducting ethical research. If, following Bauman (1993), ethical relationships are

¹⁹ I outline the principle of harm in more detail in the next section. Here, I focus more on the universality of consent, rather than on whether or not covert research causes any actual harm.

²⁰ Also see earlier in this chapter for more on the ontological and epistemological differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

characterized by an ongoing interrogation of the types of responsibilities that we might owe to others, and which cannot be reduced to a simple exercise in rule following, it becomes apparent that the application of many of the existing rules bears little relationship to ethical conduct whatsoever. We have reached the point where breaking many of the rules imposed by REBs [Research Ethics Boards] would not in fact results in unethical conduct – if ethics is conceived of as anything beyond simple rule-following.

Drawing on Haggerty (2004) therefore, I argue that while I may have implemented the ‘rules’ of consent retrospectively and in somewhat unorthodox fashion, since consent *has* been attained, I have not broken them nor have I behaved ‘unethically’. Moreover, borrowing from Spicker (2011, p.126), it is possible to contest the oft-proposed ‘erosion of liberty’ objection to covert research. As Spicker writes:

If the process of the research is burdensome, intrusive, or oppressive, that may be true; but it is not clear why it should be more true of covert research than it is of other kinds, undertaken with or without the subject’s consent...The process of disclosure may be intrusive or burdensome; in some circumstances it may be alarming.

What Spicker argues, essentially, is that the application of the principle of consent and voluntary participation in the social sciences is arbitrary. Berg (2007) makes a similar point, extending this criticism to the nature of ‘volunteering’ in general.

Outlining this argument, Berg (2007) gives the example of a teacher asking a class to take part (voluntarily) in a piece of research. This resonates with my own experience as a football coach-researcher. He notes that while the teacher may suggest that there will be no penalties for those who choose not to participate, some students may be suspicious and/or disbelieve this – thus, while no punishment is planned, these students may decide to take part in order to ‘fit in.’ As Berg (2007) points out, in many cases ‘voluntary’ participants would actually have been coerced and manipulated into participating, and thus confidence in the data would be undermined. In relation to my own research on boys at West-Side football academy, I find Berg’s comments supportive of my own decision (as their coach, in a position much like the teacher example he uses) to seek consent retrospectively.

The process of gaining consent, then, is not without its problems. In this vein, Spicker (2011) contests the idea that covert research (because it ‘breaks the rules’) is inherently *unethical*. Equally, Spicker (2011), among others (e.g. Calvey, 2008;

McKenzie, 2009) contests the idea that overt research (because it ‘follows the rules’) is inherently *ethical*. These scholars allege that *most overt studies will employ covert practices* (McKenzie, 2009), and that covert practices are often unreported or “routinely glossed over in sanitized overt accounts” (Calvey, p.909). Interestingly, McKenzie (2009) notes that ethnographic research can often change direction in unanticipated ways, and that even overt researchers with the best intentions will rarely tell all of their participants *everything* about their research; researchers, for example, may simplify or understate the aims of the research when explaining it to participants, thereby limiting the ‘informed’ aspect of consent. McKenzie (2009) suggests, therefore, that researchers criticising covert practices should proceed with caution when taking the moral high ground. Taking McKenzie’s (2009) comments on board, I attempted to be clear about the aims of this research in my retrospective consent letter, and to be clear about what the research actually turned out to be about and how I sought to represent them.

Echoing the ethical complexity of covert research in the social sciences with regard to consent, Israel and Hay (2006, p.61) write:

The call for informed consent may seem relatively straightforward, but many researchers have found it extremely difficult to gain informed consent in practice and in some situations have argued that the need for such consent has damaged their research and has not been in the best interest of research participants.

Israel and Hay make an important point about the assumption that consent protects participants from harm. The principle of avoiding harm is something I take up in more detail in the next section. In this vein, I argue, as others have (e.g. McKenzie, 2009), that my lack of disclosure regarding my research at the start of the observation phase can be justified on the grounds that my presence did not harm the research participants/subjects, that all field-notes and writing-up of data has concealed their identities as best as is possible, and that I also informed participants of my intention to utilise observation data and sought their consent for this retrospectively. Importantly, I argue that I also did not disguise my identity to gain access to this setting. Therefore, borrowing from McKenzie (2009, p.7), it could be argued that my methodology was acceptable since it did not deliberately damage the ‘credibility’ or ‘reputation’ of the subject (c.f. Denzin and Erikson, 1982, p.143).

5.4.2.4 RISK AND HARM

Speaking of ‘damage,’ another aspect to consider in conducting social research (and not only covert approaches) is the extent to which participants are at risk of harm. Simply, this is captured in the mantra *do no harm*. Israel and Hay (2006, p.95), for example, observe that “most moral systems require people to refrain from hurting anyone else intentionally unless there is good reason.” Moreover, they add (Israel and Hay, 2006, p.110): “In most contexts, researchers are expected to develop strategies that minimize the risks of causing physical, psychological, social or economic harm to research participants” (see also ESRC, 2015). To be clear, I have argued in the above sections of this chapter that covert research *can* be ethical, despite contravening established ethical principles, and I further contend that my use of covert methods is justified on the grounds that, not only did I attain consent retrospectively, but also that participants/subjects were neither at risk of harm, nor *actually* harmed, physically, psychologically, or socially. Put differently, to borrow from Goffman (1961, p.ix-x), people in the study setting simply went about their “daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject,” as did I, making my observations from my coach-as-researcher position.

Having said this, while no harm was caused in the process of conducting this research, I was sensitive to the potential for my research findings, if (and hopefully when) published, to engender a sense of betrayal among participants, should they not have been consulted or asked for consent. The act of publishing the findings of this research, therefore, may have (potentially) constituted the greatest risk of harm in the scope of this research. In deliberating consent in parameters of my own research, I have identified three (potential) harms resulting from the (potential) publication of research which has not undergone some form of consent process; these relate to (i) the participants, (ii) institutions, and (iii) the researcher.

Firstly, should consent *not* have been sought, publication (that is, the act of making the results of this study public), *may* have caused some upset among the boys and colleagues I have observed, and perhaps a sense of betrayal. Conscious of the potential for publication to cause harm, therefore, I have worked hard to ensure that all data obtained have been anonymised, such that no individuals are identifiable in the

research. With such a small sample size, it is possible, however, that some participants will be able to recognise themselves and others in the data. Every care has been taken to minimise this possibility. Minimising this possibility is something I have done for both (covert) observations data (where consent was gained retrospectively) *and* (overt) interview data (where consent was gained before interviewing).

Secondly, while the ethical approval of the University of Bath Ethics Committee and institutional consent (from the academy manager at West-Side) was attained *before* conducting this research, I am conscious that the publication of data from this research may upset some who are imbricated in the institution of professional football, as well as organisations who promote competitive sports. In this vein, Israel and Hay (2006, p.109) have noted that social science researchers, while seeking to refrain from harming individuals, are justified in conducting and publishing research that may reveal or critique the disadvantaging or exploitative practices of corporate or institutional entities. My anonymisation of the football club and the individuals portrayed in this research means that this can be achieved while protecting (to an extent) the club, other coaches, and boys themselves.

Lastly, in addition to the potential harm to participants and institutions that may come from the publication of research, I want to pick up on the observations of Roger Homan (1980, p.46) who has discussed the idea that covert research, while “in certain cases favourable to and in the interests of subjects,” may be “potentially detrimental to the personality of the fieldworker.” Homan’s idea that the researcher might be harmed, not physically, but emotionally, by their own research is interesting since it raises the question of how the social researcher deals with the personal harm that publication of data might cause them. To be clear, since I will be named as the author of this research, it will be evident that I have utilised my occupational role as a football academy coach to conduct (initially covert) social research.

In this regard, academic colleagues who are unimpressed with the manner in which I have conducted my own research and gone about the process of attaining consent retrospectively may brand my findings illegitimate on the grounds that I indulged in ‘deception.’ Colleagues in editorial positions may in future block my findings from being

published. Moreover, should the (critical) findings from my research penetrate popular culture and be read by the gatekeepers of the football world (including my current academy manager, fellow coaches, players, and parents), there is the potential that this might make it difficult for me to coach in professional football academies in the future. In this vein, I would argue (a) that (due to the anonymity of participants in the data reported in this thesis) the risk to participants is not substantial enough to warrant censure, and (b) I would also draw on Miller and Tewksbury (2010, p.496) to argue that where there is risk to the researcher, “researchers should be entitled to afford themselves the same license of participation.”

5.4.2.5 SUMMARY

In this part of my research I utilised an approach to participant observation in which ethical approval from the University of Bath Ethics Committee was sought and granted, and institutional consent (from the academy manager) was gained, but participant consent was not (initially) sought. Instead, participant consent was attained later upon the completion of observations. In navigating issues around (‘covert’) participant observations, I have found affinity with Homan and Bulmer (1982, p.121) who have observed that:

Many of the practices which covert methods are criticised for (the betrayal of trust, deception, the invasion of privacy, damage of field relations and the reputation of social research) are neither necessary nor exclusive to covert method: they are both avoidable in covert research and are probable hazards in explicit investigations.

Having engaged with and reflected on the key objections to covert methods, therefore, it does not seem inappropriate at this point to suggest, as Calvey (2008, p.905) does, that: “The standard discourse on ethics is abstracted from the doing, which is a mediated and contingent set of practices.” Moreover, de Laine (2000, p.79) has suggested that each fieldwork situation brings its own set of ethical problems, and with this I am inclined to agree; my research has raised a number of methodological, practical, and ethical problems which I have attempted to approach with a situational rather than absolutist perspective. In summary, the above discussion of my own use of covert participant observation should be read as a frank account of situated ethics; the kind that McKenzie (2009) has called for. As McKenzie (ibid, p.7) writes:

In order to engage in ethical debates based on the reality of conducting participant observations, researchers should reflect honestly upon the ethical integrity of their research. Only when frank accounts of situated ethics are published can the true ethical status of a research study be debated.

In this sense, I hope this account goes some way to helping other researchers think about my own researcher position, but also their own researcher positions; that is, to think about their attitude toward and utilisation of ‘covert’ and ‘overt’ research methods, to think about their own approaches to attaining (informed) consent (whether initially or retrospectively), and subsequently (in writing these issues into their research) to be accountable for their own practical and ethical decisions.

5.4.3 INTERVIEWS

In addition to the observation period, further data for this current study were produced using semi-structured interviews with twelve (n=12) 14-15 year old boys, all White-British, registered to the club’s academy. Interviewees were from one of the teams at West-Side academy, in which approximately 100 boys participate across eight age groups from nine to sixteen years old. Interviews took place in a venue chosen by the participants and their parents, with the majority being in their family homes. All participants agreed to the interviews being audio-taped, with the understanding that their interview data would be anonymised when transcribed and that audio-recordings would be kept secure and destroyed upon completion of transcription. Outlining the method of interviewing, Ackroyd and Hughes (1983, p.66) have noted that interviews are:

...encounters between a researcher and a respondent in which the latter is asked a series of questions relevant to the subject of the research. The respondent’s answers constitute the raw data analysed at a later point in time by the researcher.

On the potential of interviews as a method of generating data, May (1993, p.91) has noted that interviews “can yield rich sources of data on people’s experiences, opinions, aspirations and feelings.” Furthermore, May (1993) points out that to be able to yield such data, researchers must understand the interview method, that is, the dynamics of interviewing, the different methods of interviewing, and the strengths and limitations of interview methods. Accordingly, in the following sections, I outline the purpose of my own use of (qualitative) interviewing in which I utilise a semi-structured approach to

interviews, an approach to interviewing in-between the structured interview and the unstructured interview which utilises techniques from both. I also outline some of the ethical considerations that are relevant to the process of conducting interviews with adolescents. Moreover, I discuss the context and sample of this study and some of the practicalities of conducting interviews with boys I had previously coached in the academy.

5.4.3.1 (QUALITATIVE) SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

As Brown and Potrac (2009) have noted in their research on youth footballers who were ‘released’ around the same age as the boys I have interviewed in my own research, rather than fixed and rigid interview schedules, those interviews in which provisional themes and topics can be drawn on to engage with participants can help them to tell their story in their own way, while helping researchers to better understand participants’ social worlds. Outlining the theoretical rationale for interviewing, May (1993) points out that interviewing techniques can be thought of as aligning with different philosophical schools of thought (see earlier in this chapter). As May (1993, p.92) writes:

In moving from the structured interview to the unstructured interview, we shift from a situation in which the researcher attempts to control the interview and ‘teach’ the respondent to reply in accordance with the interview-schedule instructions (standardization), to a situation in which the respondent is encouraged to answer a question in her or his own terms. We may therefore characterize interviews along a quantitative–qualitative dimension, varying from the formal standardized example (surveys), to an unstructured situation of qualitative depth which allows the respondent to answer without feeling constrained by the pre-formulated ideas of the researcher.

Whereas in the structured interview the questionnaire is the instrument of data collection, May (1993) notes that in the semi-structured interview the researcher is more directly involved in the process of producing data. As May (1993, p.93) points out: “Questions are normally specified, but the interviewer is freer to probe beyond the answers in a manner which would often seem prejudicial to the aims of standardization and comparability.” Brown and Potrac (2009, p.146) described this process of interviewing in terms of *reflexivity*. In this sense, May (1993), suggests that working from a semi-structured interview guide allows the researcher more freedom and flexibility than in the structured interview; and in being released from a uniform

interview structure, the researcher can look to seek *clarification* and *elaboration* during the interview, enabling them to *probe* beyond the face-value of answers and *invite* interviewees to expand on their experiences, opinions, and feelings.

“These types of interviews,” writes May (1993, p.93) “are therefore said to allow people to answer more on their own terms than the standardized interview permits, but still provide a greater structure for comparability over the focused [unstructured] interview.” Importantly, notes May (1993), to make the most of the semi-structured interview, in which the context of the interviewees experiences is intimately linked to the content of what they say in the interview, it is typical for researchers who have an understanding or experience of the context (e.g. as ethnographer) to conduct the interviews themselves. In this vein, I utilised semi-structured interviewing in order to make use of the flexible conversation it allows (c.f. Brown and Potrac, 2009). While I approached the interviews with a focus and some aims with regard to themes I wanted to discuss, at particular times in each interview this approach allowed interviewees to talk more freely about a topic and to talk about a topic in their own words, allowing their own meanings to emerge in the data, that is, providing that data with the qualitative depth I was seeking.

Of course, as noted in the overview of research philosophy, this is not to say that data collected through this (qualitative, semi-structured interview) process is more ‘true’ and data collected through more structured interviews conducted by non-natives will be more ‘false,’ rather they *may* produce *different* perspectives on the *same* issues. Indeed, despite sharing some formative experiences with the professional footballers he interviewed, Roderick (2006a, p.8) notes that he was not *one of them*. Acknowledging the ‘frames of reference’ (c.f. Goffman, 1961) that he brought to interviews and the research process through his own personal biography (as an ex-professional), Roderick (2006a, p.8) notes that being an ex-professional may have brought him closer to his participants emotionally, initially orchestrating in him a feeling that the professionals he was interviewing were ‘special’. Roderick (2006a) further reflects on the pangs of empathy that he felt towards his respondent’s football-related insecurities.

Like Roderick (2006a) therefore, I am sensitive to the possibility that – while having significant value in terms of rapport, understanding, empathy, and ‘knowledge’ of the culture of West-Side football academy – my own experiences in my own football career and coaching career may have ‘clouded’ my sociological thinking, affected my reactions to their stories, and therefore led me to ask subsequent questions and develop interviews in a way unique to my own orientations and value stances, and the dynamics of my relationships with participants. I reflect on my interview encounters further in the following sections.

5.4.3.2 THE PRACTICE OF INTERVIEWING

On the practice of interviewing, May (1993, p.96) points out the importance of establishing an “intersubjective understanding” between interviewer and interviewee, while at the same time maintaining a “self-conscious awareness” and “distance” from the situation in order to be able to judge and analyse conversations as they “flow.” In line with some of the reflexive issues about my own experiences I began to discuss in relation to Roderick’s (2006a) interviews with current professional footballers, from his researcher position as an ex-professional, May (1993, p.96) notes that, to achieve this “balance” between “full engagement” and “detached analysis,” interviewers must be aware of and take into account several issues regarding the effect they may be having on the interview process:

First there is the question of the interviewer’s role: what effect is the interviewer having on the interviewee and hence the type of material collected? Is the interviewer’s role during the interview one of impartial scientists or friend and how does this affect the interview? Related to this are discussions on the characteristics of interviewers: what is their age, sex, race and accent?

May (1993, p.97) points out that interviewers must be able to maintain the interest of the interviewee during the interview, making them feel that their participation and answers are valued. Put differently, in order to motivate the interviewee to go deeper into the conversation with them, interviewees must feel that the interviewer is genuinely interested in what is being talked about. May (1993) highlights “directive” and “non-directive” questions as being useful in eliciting information and in coaxing interviewees to elaborate on their responses. Since qualitative research is all about the depth and richness of experience, opinion, and feelings, interviewers conducting in-depth interviews from this research approach, therefore, should be aware of ways to

encourage interviewee elaboration. Questions that elicit “Yes” and “no” answers may be useful in clarifying particular information, but non-directive questions will allow for more depth. May (1993, p.97) provides some examples of non-directive questions, for example, “Could you tell me a little more about that?” Similarly, Atkinson (1998, p.31) highlights how asking participants questions such as “what did that mean to you?” or “how did that make you feel?” can elicit more detail in certain aspects of their stories, and encourage a more reflective stance on their experiences.

Interesting, May (1993, p.98) notes that the ability to “probe” is reduced as an interview becomes more structured. The inability to probe may have further practical consequences for the interview, too. For example, because (on the other hand) semi-structured and unstructured interviews allow for more probing and deviation from the main line of questioning, they can feel more like real everyday conversations, and this can allow the interviewer to create a more welcoming, co-operative, and compassionate setting. Feeling more valued, interviewees are likely to have a more positive attitude toward their participation, and subsequently are likely to enhance their own disclosure. Spradley (1979) has discussed this sense of trust in terms of *rapport*, and highlights it as an important consideration for interviewing.

Spradley (1979, p.78) defines *rapport* as “a basic sense of trust” between the interviewer and interviewee. Furthermore, Spradley (1979, p.78) notes that developing *rapport* “allows for the free flow of information.” While I was not a stranger to the boys I interviewed, and thus had some previous shared history from which to develop *rapport* during the interview process, I still found it useful to follow some of Spradley’s processes for establishing *rapport*, since like Roderick (2006a) I was not *one of them*. Spradley’s advice on using *descriptive questions* early in the interview, for example, was helpful in order to get the boys to give an account of their “average day” at the academy, and from this “grand tour” I was then able to follow up with more specific questions or probes to get more of an insight into particular parts of their experiences.

For example, particular experiences, opinions, or feelings could then be followed up with questions, such as: “what did you mean when you said...?” From here, Spradley (1979, p.120) points out that interviewers can move into *structural questions*, which

may enable them to explore in more depth the experiences of the interviewee. Spradley notes that these questions may take the form of “verification” questions, to explore and check particular ideas. More recently, McFee (2010, p.75) has recognised the importance of rapport in not only encouraging sharing, but also in asking questions and recognising when obfuscations or evasions are likely. In this sense, my rapport with participants helped to keep interviews open, and generated over twenty five hours of rich and in-depth interview data.

With regards to my own research, therefore, the process of interviewing can perhaps be described as beginning far in advance of the first interviews being conducted (c.f. May, 1993); that is, as far as my interviews with these boys were concerned, it was important for me to have an understanding of their situation, the structure and form that the interviews and questions would eventually take (i.e. semi-structured, directive and non-directive questions), the process of developing trust (rapport and use of descriptive ‘warm up’ questions), the types of questions that can be asked to elicit particular forms of information (structural questions and use of probes), as well as being sensitive to a host of ethical, political and theoretical issues that may come into play during the process of interviewing.

5.4.3.3 (FEMINIST) ENGAGEMENT IN THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

Oakley (1990) argues that *not* engaging in an open dialogue with interviewees reflects a ‘masculine paradigm’ of (positivist) research, in which researchers are focused on objectivity in the research process. In this school of thought, maintaining social distance from interviewees can be seen as an attempt at *controlling* for over-rapport, and thus limiting the effect of the researcher on the data collection process. In line with Oakley’s (1979) experience of interviewing women about the prospect of giving birth, I drew on feminist approaches to interviewing in my own approach, focusing on *engagement* rather than disengagement in the process of interviewing.

Similar to Oakley, I found that interviews with the boys in my own study became (at times) a two-way process rather than a one-way process of extracting information from them. For example, some boys asked me questions about my own experiences, thoughts, and on a few occasions some asked for personal advice. I decided that *not* answering questions would not be conducive to maintaining rapport and so when these

questions were asked I resolved to reciprocate and give genuine answers, while indicated that these were *my own experiences and thoughts* and not necessarily 'truths'. I struggled to reconcile the idea that I could ask these boys to discuss their experiences and feelings openly and honestly, yet not engage in the dialogue in a similar fashion. In this vein, I find affinity with Oakley's (1990) observation that disengagement in the interview process was not realistic and could not be entertained as a viable interview approach. Indeed, I felt, as Oakley also observes, that asking others about their experiences but then not being forthcoming with one's own experiences was somewhat unreasonable, and bordering on exploitation.

5.4.3.4 CONTEXT, SAMPLE, AND THE PRACTICALITIES OF INTERVIEWING ACADEMY BOYS

All the boys interviewed for this research are White British, from predominantly upper working-class/lower-middle class backgrounds. While some of the boys lived within the inner West-Side area, many lived in suburban areas and neighbouring towns, with those living the furthest away making journeys of approximately one-hour to attend training sessions. Some of 'the boys' had been 'released' from the West-Side at the time of interview, but each was known (and had been coached) by me in my *previous* capacity as an academy coach at West-Side. Importantly, and helping to mediate social desirability bias in interview data, I was *not* coaching any of the participants at the time of interviews and was no longer working for the football club. My distance from West-Side academy was something I stressed to participants before (and during) interviews in order to (continually) distance myself from institutional power and to reduce the potential effects of my professional background on the interview data (c.f. Richards & Emslie, 2000).

After the observation period was complete, parents/guardians of each of the boys were contacted by telephone. At this point, with ethical approval from the University of Bath Ethics Committee already granted, I sought consent for interviews to be conducted. The conversations I had with parents on the phone provided a chance to explain the premise of the interviews, as well as for parents to share updates on their son's football progress which I took the time to enquire about. In some cases, I even had an opportunity to talk to individual boys' right then and there on the phone, which provided a chance to outline the purpose of the interviews and assure them that any audio-

recorded interviews would be kept private and not shared with others. At other times, parents invited me to contact their son directly through their personal mobile number, and in other cases parents consulted with their sons and called me back to confirm an interview date, time, and venue.

All interviews took place on a one-to-one basis, agreed with parents and boys in advance. On arriving at interviews, parents and boys were provided with an information leaflet outlining the research and the purpose of the interviews, with each boy was also assured that, should any of their interview data be used in subsequent attempts to publish the research, their names would be changed so as not to identify them and preserve their anonymity. The information leaflet also provided my own contact details, and the contact details of my supervisor (Dr. Tina Skinner). Each boy was then asked to carefully read and sign a consent form to formalise the verbal consent that had been issued over the phone. In accordance with data protection regulations, audio-recordings and written-transcripts would then be deleted upon completion of the study. Interviews were arranged and conducted accordingly.

All interviews conducted were semi-structured in nature, lasted between 60-120 minutes, and generally took place where participants and parents felt most comfortable – these were primarily at family homes (with a number of these being conducted in the back garden when privacy inside the home was lacking and when the weather allowed for this); however, at the negotiation of some boys and with the consent of parents, three interviews were conducted in public spaces outside of the family home (these included a local café and a family-friendly diner/restaurant; the kinds of places where families bring their children, with outdoor seating and play areas).

In such cases of interviewing boys in public spaces, I was always careful to be sensitive to boys' desires for privacy, finding seating spaces that would encourage an open dialogue, yet keeping interviews visible to members of the public. As an example of the sensitivities required by researchers in such situations, I note that in one interview both myself and the boy I was interviewing had begun to lower our voices when two people had occupied a nearby table. After a couple more questions which provided only short (and somewhat quieter) responses, I suggested that we move to a table on

the outside patio, since the weather was mild enough to do so). The interview was then able to continue at regular-volume, with responses returning to their previous detail and depth.

While interviews were semi-structured and thus, to some extent, meandered in various ways, each interview began with descriptive questions encouraging each boy to share with me how they first got into football, and what it was like being in a football academy – this line of thought opened up a space for a conversation regarding each boys' current 'situation' at West-Side, and amounted to an abbreviated life-history; that is, their initial introduction to the game through family, friends, and school, and their subsequent 'journey' into and through a local 'grass-roots' club and then into academy football. These discussions served as useful in developing some further rapport, including some shared-experiences of life at West-Side, but also in fostering a sense of ownership of the interview (i.e. having the chance to tell *their* story).

Methodologically, conscious that male interviewers may suffer in their data collection efforts because of a tendency to dominate conversations (c.f. Fishman, 1990), my aim in this part of the interview was to establish myself as being a "sympathetic listener," that is, as someone with whom interviewees welcomed the opportunity to talk (c.f. Finch, 1984, p.74). Elsewhere, Roderick (2006a) has described his role in interviews as being an 'active listener' helping interviewees to piece together their stories as they told them, rather than dominating the encounter. One way I sort to do this was to use similar language and vocabulary when discussing football matters, drawing on my own 'knowledge' of West-Side academy, and also by reflecting back their use of language where it was appropriate and where it did not jar with my own sense of authenticity; this facilitated more natural and 'real' conversations, in many respects making the interviews feel less formal.

It was my intention that by purposefully allowing each boy some space to talk about and reflect on their footballing experiences to-date that feelings, thoughts, and attitudes concerning their footballing experiences would 'bubble-up' to the surface where they could be accessed, expressed, and interrogated as the interviews progressed. While I had earlier been advised by some departmental colleagues that interviews of this kind

with adolescent boys would be arduous, and that I should not expect interviews to be free-flowing or last much longer than 30-45 minutes, I was buoyed in early interviews by a sense of them being more 'rich' than I had expected. As one West-Side academy player told me during an interview:

I feel like I can just say what I want and I know it'll help, whatever I say, like I know it'll help with your work, I can say what I think cos it's gonna help people, I can say how I really feel, and even if it's good or bad.

To me, this interview extract offered some modest affirmation that my approach to interviewing was of value and was generating the open and rich interview data I was hoping for, although whether I have achieved an adequate understanding of the culture of West-Side and the experiences of this group of boys can be judged by the readers of this study. The above interview extract also offers tentative evidence that boys interviewed did not feel that they needed to give socially-desirable answers. Before another interview, after I had explained that interviews would be kept confidential, that data would be anonymised when transcribed and that I hoped this would encourage him to be as open and honest in his responses as possible, one academy player told me: "You know me Adi, I'll tell you what I think." On the phone to the father of one academy player (following up on a request to conduct an interview with his son), I was told: "Yeah he said he'll talk to you, he's got lots to say about West-Side." Each of these moments strengthened my own confidence in the data presented in this thesis and my confidence that boys were happy to talk to me about the issues explored in this thesis. Moreover, to further mitigate against social-desirability bias in interview data, I conducted follow-up interviews with some boys in order to build on some of the themes that emerged in initial interviews and to check the authenticity of my own emerging insights. These follow-up interviews also served as a way to check for consistency in responses between interviews. Finally, these early interviews (each one transcribed before the next took place – c.f. Brown and Potrac, 2009), were valuable in the sense that they provided a platform for identifying, analysing, and developing on multiple emerging 'themes' for subsequent interviews.

5.5 ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING DATA

As discussed above, in this research I generated data (around themes of competition, friendships, and masculinities) utilising two methods: participant observations and

interviews. Importantly, once I had begun to *generate* data, the processes of *analysing* and *interpreting* this data were also concurrently set in motion. As such, similar to the data analysis and interpretation approach taken by others (e.g. Brown and Potrac, 2009; Sparkes, 2000), the analysis of data did not start only when all of the data had been collected; on the contrary, in this research the processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation were not distinct, linear tasks, but were intertwined throughout the data collection process. Adopting from the outset, what Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have called a process of *indwelling*, I immersed myself in the data as soon as data collection began; observation field notes were transcribed, or written-up, on the days they were made and interview transcriptions began as soon as possible upon completion of the interviews, often that evening, so that further interviews were conducted *in light* of the themes that had emerged from the previous interviews (c.f. Brown and Potrac, 2009; Sparkes, 2000). This was in keeping with the notion of reflexivity discussed earlier. While transcription itself was generally laborious at the time and could often take 4-5 hours per interview (as well as 1-2 hours for writing up observation notes), on reflection this process assisted in my interpretation and analysis of data. In this regard, I found that the process of transcribing and writing up notes often included 're-reading' field notes or 're-listening' to multiple interviews concurrently, in order to identify and connect individual 'units' of data that were scattered across interviews and observations.

At this point, as Potrac and Jones (2009a) have suggested (also see Glaser and Strauss, 1967), individual units of data could then be grouped, compared, merged, divided, and (re)constructed into 'themes' to allow more abstract levels of analysis to take place and more embracing thematic categories to be 'coded' and organised, whereby new concepts, themes, and categories could inductively "arise" from the data. Practically, what coding meant for me was typing up data and (observational, theoretical, and methodological) notes on a word-processor and systematically reading through and 'cutting and pasting' data into various topic headings. This was not analysis *per se* but was helpful when it later came to relating data under these topic headings to concepts from my masculinities-led theoretical framework. At this point I also included notes on the practicalities of participant observation and interviewing;

that is, what I have come to think of as the 'planning,' 'doing' and 'writing' of ethnography.

In this regard, while data-management software packages are available (such as NVivo), I preferred to move data around manually as I felt this technique mirrored more closely the process of 'indwelling' I was attempting to achieve, and would enable me to retain more familiarity with the raw data as I constructed them into a presentable, logical, yet rich ethnographic 'picture.' Put differently, as part of the process of analysis, I found that 'coding' the open-ended semi-structured interviews and observation data allowed for some comparison and sense-making to begin to take place, and kick-started a process of data being meaningfully 'connected' to theory.

Importantly, however, as Atkinson (quoted in Silverman, 1985, p.50) points out, sociological concepts did not "stare me in the face" or "leap out" from the data at this early point in the data collection and analysis process. Indeed, my experience of the interpretation and analysis of data was of an on-going process that continued right through the 'writing-up' stage of this research. In practical terms, for example, the work/labour-perspective to my analysis came much later on in this thesis, once an initial analysis had been conducted from a gender/masculinities-perspective.

In a reflexive effort to most accurately portray the experience of being in a professional football academy, therefore, I recognise that the process of making analytical 'sense' of my own ethnographic data was not a tidy, logical, and compartmentalised task that was done in a vacuum and could be 'ticked off' my PhD 'to-do' list, but was a messy, frustrating, and contingent activity that extended from the point of beginning data collection to the point of thesis submission. Living with and working through what I perceived at times to be an out-of-control analytical mess was one of the hardest parts of this experience of doing ethnography.

Following Sparkes and Smith (2002, p.266), the process of analysing data was therefore viewed as one requiring constant "reflection on and interpretation of alternative explanations and interpretations." An additional layer to this process of reflection (later) included the sharing of (anonymised) data and themes with

supervisors (Dr. Tina Skinner, Dr. Nicola Ingram), and other academics (Professor Eric Anderson) and colleagues to facilitate discussions of my initial interpretations. As May (1993, p.107) points out, “seeking supportive individuals for their opinions on the data and your coding” is a useful way of alleviating frustration in the data analysis process, as well as providing an extra layer of theoretical acumen and detail to my own interpretations. Subsequently, an attempt has been made in this thesis to transcend raw data generated using participant observations and interviews into theoretical explanation; that is, as Cushion and Jones (2014) suggest, to situate ‘themes’ in these data within a suitably theoretical and empirical framework. In this sense, borrowing from Skinner (2005), I would suggest that the explanations and interpretations presented in this thesis are a result of the ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ (or *dialectic*) between the interview data and existing literature and theory.

Finally, as part of my analysis and interpretation of data, a further strategy of seeking the thoughts and opinions of individuals on my data was employed. Once data had been anonymised and written-up into themes, I contacted each academy player (through their parents), and mailed out (by post) copies of my analysis to each academy player that I interviewed. These analysis summaries consisted of “stripped-down” versions of the final analysis chapters; that is they focused on extracts of ‘raw’ data (participant observations and interviews), while in-depth theoretical analysis and ‘heavy’ reflections on data in relation to social theory were removed to maintain its readability. The purpose of these overviews were to give them a feel for what aspects of the football academy experience I had been looking into.

Each academy player was invited to email me (if they wished) with their thoughts, comments and reactions to my findings: for example, if there was any interpretation they disagreed with or any data they felt was not adequately anonymised. I received no negative responses or requests to remove data from my analysis. On the contrary, I received a number of positive responses from parents who were given the summary reports by their sons. One text message from a parent read: “Well done on all of this, it’s about time someone looked at this as it’s not all a bed of roses.” I also received an email from another parent after her son had given her the analysis to read.

Summarising her thoughts on my research in relation to her own experiences of having a son in a professional football academy, she wrote:

I just thought I needed to tell you, that as the mother of a footballer, I can totally relate to your findings...[my son] has and still is affected by the totally unreasonable pressures football academies and football clubs (from the age of 5 years old) have put on him. That is not to say there haven't been good things to come out of the experiences but I am not sure they out-way the bad...As a teenager with all the normal pressures, and then the rest of the pressures piled on top, it makes for a very difficult time. Mainly it seems the pressure of not wanting to let anyone down seems to sit heaviest on [his] shoulders.

After responding to this email, I received a further message from this 'concerned' parent whose son had been released from West-Side at 16-years-old and was now involved with two other clubs, one professional and one amateur:

I know he is struggling at the moment. [One club] want him to this, [the other club] want him to do that, and somewhere along the line he is trying to get grades high enough to get to Uni...The trouble is he is just burying his head in the sand because talking to any of the coaches, managers is showing a "weakness." He feels he should be able to deal with it, but unfortunately it is just turning him into a stress ball which ultimately is causing him to not perform very well in any area, football, home or socially.

Signing off this second email, this mother writes: "Hard to watch." With regards to analysis and interpretation, this was another moment during the research process that offered me some assurance that I was 'on the right track' with my interpretations and the way that I had represented boys' experiences of being in a professional football academy.

5.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I have sought to explain the methodological rationale for my own research study with the objective of outlining and justifying my use of two methods: (covert) observations (with retrospective consent) and (overt) interviews (with pre-emptive consent). The primary rationale for seeking retrospective consent for observations was discussed with regards to the Hawthorne Effect, and previous research on masculinities and homophobia in English professional football academies (e.g. Magrath, Anderson and Roberts, 2013) which has utilised interviews but without

any prior observations. To be clear, ethical approval to conduct this research was sought and granted by the University of Bath's Ethics Committee.

Furthermore, in this chapter I have sought to outline how data generated using these methods were organised and analysed to create the empirical chapters of this thesis. At the beginning of this chapter, I acknowledged that covert research is a divisive approach to research that has been widely considered 'unethical,' 'immoral,' and 'unsound' (c.f. Erikson, 1967; Homan, 1991; Herrera, 1999; Shils, 1982). Contrasting this perspective, however, I have outlined methodological debate from some researchers (e.g. Calvey, 2008; Lauder, 2003; Goode, 1996; Lugosi, 2006; Spicker, 2011) who have suggested that covert methods are a useful tool for social researchers and, importantly, that they *can* be used ethically.

I have acknowledged that the extent of the critique of covert methods means that it demands a high level of clarification and justification for its use, and this is something I have attempted to achieve in this chapter. Intimately connected to my methodological decision-making has been my own researcher circumstance as an academy football coach. As a former 'native,' or 'insider' (c.f. Merton, 1972), in the study setting I have sought to be clear about how my personal experiences and roles within the football academy have infused with a way of conducting social research that may seem at first glance to 'bend the rules' of scientific study. In this sense, in adopting an initially covert approach to observations (with institutional gatekeeper consent but not participant consent) paired with a retrospective approach to gaining consent, I have 'situated' my ethical and methodological decision making in the specific context of my research, rather than adopting an absolutist application of ethics (c.f. Calvey, 2008; Goode, 1996; Spicker, 2011). In conducting social research from this 'coach-as-researcher' position a number of complex methodological, practical, and ethical issues emerged. As such, by outlining in detail my researcher position I hope that readers can better understand my own (subjective) position within the research context and how this infused and tangled with multiple and varied methodological, practical, and ethical considerations.

Furthermore, in this chapter I have outlined my use of in-depth qualitative interviewing as a way of adding layers of experience, opinion, and feeling to observation data. I

utilised this approach as a way of having flexible conversations with the boys who were embroiled in the study setting, as a way of allowing their own meanings to be written into the research, and as a way of balancing the 'reality' of observations with the 'reality' of their stories. As part of this process, I have outlined the practicalities of interviewing, and some of the issues with interviewing that were relevant to my own experiences of interviewing the boys of West-Side football academy, for example the issue of social desirability bias in interview responses and the possibility of interviewers to 'take sides' with participants with whom they might empathise. Moreover, an attempt has been made to outline the way that data generated in this research has been organised, interpreted, and analysed (into themes around competition, friendships, and masculinities) for presentation in the forthcoming empirical chapters of this thesis.

Finally, with regard to this last point on the (re)presentation of data, as Light (2010, p.181) points out, it is important to keep in mind when reading ethnography that "writing up" ethnographic data is different from "standard" approaches to research; that is, in written accounts of ethnography the "presentation", "interpretation", and "discussion" of data are seamlessly interwoven rather than separated out into clear sections. The objective of writing ethnography is to get beyond more standard, clinical, and mechanical styles of academic writing that have proliferated as a result of the positivist/scientific turn in the social sciences (see earlier section on 'research philosophy' and 'schools of thought' in social sciences). As Light (2010, p.182) notes, since "ethnographic researchers do not pretend to be detached and impartial in the way that they 'do' ethnography," the 'standard' style of writing is inappropriate and ineffective for writing up ethnography. It is in this spirit of contemporary ethnography that I have attempted to write from an engaged perspective rather than a neutral, passive, or detached perspective; that is, writing myself *in* to the research, rather than *out* of the research (c.f. Coffey, 1999). In doing so I hope to engage the reader in a more meaningful 'narrative' and to ultimately give the reader the experience of 'being there' in the study setting. It is to these empirical chapters that I now turn my attention, beginning with a discussion of the culture and context of this football academy and the interactions that were observed in this setting.

CHAPTER 6: “THEY’RE ALWAYS TRYING TO LOOK FOR SOMEONE BETTER:” THE COMPETITIVE SOCIAL ORGANISATION OF WEST-SIDE ACADEMY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I address my first research question, concerning the social organisation of West-Side football club. Helpful in framing the findings in this chapter, Berger and Luckmann (1966, p.68) wrote that: “the organism and, even more, the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they are shaped.” It is in search of an understanding of what shapes the development of boyhood identities at West-Side football academy that this chapter explores the institutional context and culture within which the boys at the heart of this study are embroiled.

Describing institutions, Goffman (1961, p.73) has noted that “[m]any total institutions, most of the time, seem to function merely as storage dumps for inmates, but...they usually present themselves to the public as rational organizations designed consciously, through and through, as effective machines for producing a few officially avowed and officially approved ends.” Furthermore, writes Goffman (ibid), “...one frequent official objective is the reformation of inmates in the direction of some ideal standard.” To be clear about the institutional objectives of West-Side football academy, their over-arching and unmistakable aim or mission statement is to *produce professional players* for the West-Side first team; *players who can compete with their current first team players, and sustain careers in the professional football industry*²¹. Ultimately, the West-Side academy is tasked with growing players *for the benefit* of the club. All this is made explicitly clear on West-Side’s academy website. West-Side academy coaches talked frequently and enthusiastically about producing players, developing talent, and extracting potential from academy players. As I was reminded a number of times: our business as academy coaches at West-Side was the business of creating professional footballers. In this sense, it is clear that the focus of West-Side academy was not participation, but *performance*. During my time at West-Side,

²¹ Because I am anonymising the football club, I have changed the wording of this statement, and not provided a reference.

coaches and players operated within this business realm, within a climate of performance and production, where every training session, game, or meeting, was precious time in which efforts were geared towards producing a 'final product.'²²

6.2 REAL GEMS, ROUGH DIAMONDS, AND PERFORMANCE MACHINES: 'SHOP TALK' AT WEST-SIDE ACADEMY

Borrowing from Goffman's observations of institutions (1961, p.73), it is important to note that the work undertaken at West-Side football academy is uniquely to do with people. As Goffman (ibid) writes: "This *people-work* is not quite like personal work or the work of those involved in service relationships; the staff, after all, have objects and products to work upon, not services, but these objects and products are people." In this sense, boys at West-Side can be thought of as becoming "material upon which to work" (Goffman, 1961, p.73). Drawing on my field notes to convey the language, 'shop talk,' and people-work being done in this study setting, I highlight how on watching and assessing the football performance of a thirteen year-old boy, one academy coach noted to his colleagues (including me) that he thought that West-Side had "unearthed a real gem." In another field note, I noted that another boy, twelve years old, was described by a West-Side coaching colleague as "a diamond in the rough," in need of some "refinement" but with the potential to become a professional if we (as coaches) could "get enough coaching into him." Embedded in this setting as an academy coach, during my time researching at West-Side I became increasingly aware of and disconcerted by the detached ways in which we as coaches would discuss the worth and value of youth players. In language reflective of an institution guided by neoliberal principles –as outlined in CHAPTER TWO in my discussion of the work of Coakley (2011) –in which the production of marketable assets is the marker of economic success and merit, coaches at West-Side consistently discussed youth academy player as commodities, for example, to be discovered, acquired, protected, developed, bought and sold.

My field notes also revealed that in my time at West-Side it was not unusual (including myself) to speculate with coaching colleagues which of *our* current "crop" of boys could

²²The final product here was the 'production' of a young player capable of going on to play as a professional at West-Side.

be “worth a bit of money” in a few years, as they (potentially) progress into the professional ranks. Moreover, also drawing on my field notes, I highlight how it was common for boys who demonstrated the greatest levels of athleticism, physicality, and endurance (as well as the ability to “play through”²³ injuries), to be described as “machines,” “beasts,” or “tanks:” lauded for their qualities and accomplishments at the same time as being detached from their own humanness by both coaches and boys themselves. Textured with the tones of industry and commerce, the use of such phraseology hinted at a collective institutional perspective among coaches and boys themselves of youth academy footballers as primarily (potential) assets to West-Side football club, indicative of a wider professional football industry culture and context in which a boy’s/man’s use and value in life is intimately linked to his ability to create financial wealth. This is, perhaps, nothing new. Roderick (2006ab), for example, has highlighted the feelings among ex-professional footballers that their careers are insecure and their bodies are imbricated with ideas of ‘performance’ and creating success for their clubs, managers and other stakeholders who hold sway over when and where (or not) they will get to play the game they love. Linking this to a contemporary example, the media have recently reported on young professional footballer Saido Berahino being treated ‘like a piece of meat’ as he became the focal point of a potential big money transfer from one elite club to another (BBC Sport, 28 August 2015²⁴).

Further reflecting on my time in the field, and the associations made by colleagues and myself between young academy footballers and the language of industry, I highlight the many “gems” that were brought to my attention during my time at West-Side football academy. This industrially-themed shop-talk I engaged in and encountered in the field brings to mind Jay Coakley’s (1992, p.284) criticism of competitive sports structures for treating young human beings as little more than “performance machines.” To contextualise this chapter further I also draw on the work of social constructionist thinkers (c.f. Berger and Luckmann, 1966) to highlight the ways that the particular designs of institutional (work) life may ‘manage’ or ‘reorient’ how individuals think, feel

²³Direct quotes from field notes.

²⁴ “Saido Berahino is not a lump of meat – Tony Pulis” article on BBC Sport website, accessed online here: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/34088004>

and live; that is, how individuals' emotions and feelings are 'mined' (c.f. Hochschild, 1983) in order to carve themselves out as valuable resources to be exchanged for a wage in the economic marketplace.

In the context of the industrial and commercial language I have just described, I find the analogy of mining to be particularly apt. In this vein, I continue this chapter by focusing on the social organisation of West-Side football academy, that is, a variety of (perhaps neoliberal) narratives that foreground its hierarchical organisation, use of competitive reward structures, focus on individual responsibility, and what West-Side academy coaches depicted as professionalism. Here my intention is to present a number of emergent themes around *social organisation* from my time at West-Side, consolidating field notes and interview extracts which highlight the culture and context of West-Side football academy. Thus, I have organised the rest of this chapter around (i) the idea of West-Side as a decreasing opportunity structure (i.e. where 'the numbers go down'), (ii) lived-experiences of competition and insecurity in the youth academy setting (i.e. "they're always looking for someone better"), and (iii) the over-conformity by youth academy players to the 'West-Side ethic' (i.e. adhering to club 'rules', 'listening' to coaches, and 'being low-maintenance').

6.3 A PLACE WHERE "THE NUMBERS GO DOWN:" UNDERSTANDING WEST-SIDE FOOTBALL ACADEMY AS A DECREASING OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

You gotta work hard, there's a lot of people at sixteen who don't get there, there's a lot of people trying, but the numbers go down, it gets narrower and narrower. It's tough and not many make it. Like last year, they only took two scholarships out of the whole team of sixteen. The chances are hard.

– West-Side Academy Player²⁵

Despite most West-Side boys saying they thought *they* would be OK, and that *they* would make it, the interview extract above depicts the social reality of the professional football industry that boys at West-Side are located within. West-Side academy is – as the academy player notes above – a place where the numbers go down each year, and a place where the chances of 'making it' to the professional levels are slight and

²⁵ To enhance anonymity, I have used boys' pseudonyms when using interview data in later chapters, but not in this chapter. This is so that it is more difficult to identify individuals by connecting what they said and what they did between different chapters.

the opportunities to continue ever-decreasing, with the chances of being 'let go' real and lingering. Highlighting this, for example, in each of the two seasons previous to my beginning field-work, I learned that only two or three boys each year had been offered a scholarship place at the age of sixteen. Other scholarship places were offered to boys who had been released from professional clubs in higher divisions. In this regard, it is evident that boys at West-Side were not just competing with the other boys in their team (their 'friends' – see CHAPTER EIGHT), but with boys from other academies in England, and (perhaps) globally. In an interview, providing his thoughts on his own future at West-Side, one academy player told me:

They always say only five or six people can get scholarships in a year group, and you sort of think, you've almost forgot that three more lads are in this age cos they play up, and when you think of that you think oh my god that's three people who will almost definitely get scholarships so you're really gonna have to prove something in your own team of fourteen or fifteen even without them around, you've got to try a lot better, I mean one of them came down and played again in our age group and was still one of the better players, but the other two never play for us they are always playing for the age above.

In the same interview, this boy expressed his desire to 'make it.' While I felt empathetic toward his aspirations, and liked him personally, I felt that he was labouring to convince himself that it was possible, and to reconcile this aspiration with what appeared to be a sound knowledge of the limited opportunities that likely lay before him. It made me think of myself at the same age. I remember riding the bus together with a school-mate into the town centre in Swindon where we grew up, talking about my lack of success in getting 'picked up' by a professional youth academy: he said that maybe I needed to think about 'letting go' of that dream and that as it had not happened yet (at 15 years old) it was unlikely to happen for me. Needless to say, I resented his advice, and while understanding that there was some truth in his assessment of my potential (given that it had not been recognised by a professional club so far), I sought to prove him wrong. I sensed a similar feeling here with this boy.

"I want to be a pro," he told me. "At least like make it at West-Side, maybe even higher than that. It's just sort of proving that you're good enough." Seemingly continuing to grapple with and bounce between hopes of making it and the difficult odds he would be faced with in the coming years, he adds:

There's so many pro footballers in the world and in England that you think it can't be that slim a chance. Like we are one of the best teams out of everyone we play, maybe one or two better than us, so every team we play I thought we were better. But then, well it's difficult cos obviously there's a lot of people from abroad who get brought in at every level now, so you sort of think you're competing with everyone in the world. Not just your own country. There are people from other countries who get signed in at the age of 18 so even if you're the best in your year at that age and there's only one person who can go through to pro then they sign like three people from a different country, you could be like oh god, like you sort of feel like they don't deserve it as much as you cos you've been there all your life, well three or four years, and they've just come along and yet they're just as good if not better than you and that's a bit annoying I reckon. I don't think I'll ever experience that sort of thing cos that's normally top level Championship and Premier League, but you know everyone who doesn't make it there gets bumped down and so you'll kind of experience that as well, so it does affect you.

For me, this extract is telling, a cumbersome ramble lurching between hope ("it can't be that slim a chance"), self-promotion ("we are one of the best teams out of everyone we play"), perspective ("you're competing with everyone in the world"), despair and jealousy ("you could be like oh god, like you sort of feel like they don't deserve it as much as you"), frustration ("they've just come along and yet they're just as good if not better than you and that's a bit annoying I reckon"), and a recognition of how this social process "does affect you". A number of emotions swirl and converge in this extract, difficult to unpick. This boy, now 15-years-old, but a West-Side academy-player since he was eleven, works hard emotionally to come to terms with what he perceives as the reality of his (ultimately insecure) position in the academy and his deep fusion with the machinery and decreasing opportunity structure of the professional football industry.

6.4 "THEY'RE ALWAYS TRYING TO LOOK FOR SOMEONE BETTER:" EXPERIENCING COMPETITION AND INSECURITY AT WEST-SIDE

According to some (e.g. Coakley, 2011; Giroux, 2011; Brown, 2003) the ideological force of neoliberalism is one that not only restructures markets but also human lives. The competitive social-organisational structure of West-Side football academy clearly 'fits' with the neoliberal rationality embedded in wider society: competition is deeply embedded in the fabric of the football academy experience. In the *preface* to this thesis (p.8), I described a moment from the field in which boys at West-Side academy were encouraged by their coach to think about their (precarious) position within the academy

programme and the possibility that should their standards slip and should they not be thought of as striving toward the professional level, then they might be 'released.' In this sense, boys at West-Side demonstrated an understanding that other boys would relish taking their place in the academy. Some of the themes around competition and insecurity that are evident in that field-note are taken up in more detail here. As one West-Side academy player noted in an interview:

You're trying to impress everyone, so if you know you're playing badly everyone will know that, so you want to impress everyone, your coach, the older age groups, your own age, and the year below.

Highlighting how the excitement and insecurity (which competition in a decreasing opportunity structure engenders) can perhaps be perceived as two sides of the same coin, another boy told me:

When you think of it, it's scary, but it's something that makes you more determined cos you gotta like, you know, try and beat all the other people, you gotta be better than them. So it's worrying but it drives you a little bit.

Drawing on statements such as these, boys at West-Side may therefore be thought of as finding themselves embroiled in a hyper-competitive social context; that is, being an academy player in a professional football club like West-Side can mean being in a precarious, fragile and insecure situation, in similar ways to the experience of adult professional players described by Roderick (2006ab). Part of the cycle of being an academy footballer, then, was making comparisons between one's own ability and the ability of one's teammates: 'you have to beat all the other people.' It is an odd situation these boys find themselves in: they must work together to achieve success on the field, yet they are wary of teammates' personal success making them look bad, and downgrading the worth that coaches bestow upon them. In an interview, highlighting how feelings of insecurity were imbricated with(in) the lived-experience of the competitive social structure of West-Side, one academy player noted:

They're always trying to look for someone better, always, like if there's someone better then they'll choose them over you. I think you're there cos they want you there, but only until they want someone else then they might not want you.

Thus, important was also reflecting on the ability of new teammates and, in doing so, updating one's own perception of one's position in the hierarchy of the team.

Suggesting that boys at West-Side were constantly looking 'up the ladder' and assessing and 'sizing up' how they could forge ahead of their teammates, one academy player told me:

You have to fight for your position, like, I wouldn't give up if someone come in and got signed on straight away, I'd be thinkin', I'd be lookin' at 'im thinkin' where am I better than 'im, where's he better than me, and I think, and if someone, if he's better than me in that position in that certain bit of technical ability, I'd just like right I'm gonna focus on this, I need to get better.

The dichotomy of the academy players' existence, as with professional players, is that they are part of a team, but at the same time they are also in constant competition with everyone else. The costs that prolonged participation in this kind of setting may have on boys' peer relationships and friendships with other boys is something I take up in more detail in CHAPTER EIGHT. As Hochschild (1983) has suggested, when individuals 'buy into' institutional lives which benefit them in terms of esteem, pay, and power, but which a systematic suppression of emotion and feeling, there may be *costs to be paid*. In short, the context of West-Side academy, as described by its academy players and through my field notes so far, is defined by a perpetual atmosphere of insecurity. Each boy participates knowing that, should their performances slip below their peers, things could all come to an end very abruptly. From what boys told me in interviews, they seemingly understood, and accepted, this situation. "I want it to be a job," one of the boys told me in an interview. He adds:

I've always said I want to be a footballer, it's just something you grow up with, it's one of those dreams jobs really, but then it's a lot more serious work as you go up with what's involved in it, like the training side and the serious side of it, it's not just all about the playing.

In another interview, I was told:

It's just like a never-ending cycle really, they tell you what you need to improve on and if you've not improved on them they will tell you. And then they'll give you more things to improve on that maybe have dropped off and then you'll have to improve. You work on your things to try and improve them, to like achieve the goal of being a professional footballer.

In her study of flight attendants, Hochschild (1983) notes that the trainee flight attendants know that if they do not measure up to the job at hand then there is always

someone else to take their place. Hochschild points out that such work structures *demand* that employees manage their emotions, it forces them to keep smiling even though they may not feel like it, and it encourages them to view their colleagues as competitors in order to make them more productive. In the context of West-Side football academy, I find affinity with Hochschild's observations. For example, academy coaches at West-Side made clear to boys that they were in a place where a high level of performance and behaviour is expected. The boys I spoke to seemed to understand that West-Side academy was a place where competition for places is high, especially as they get older and progressed (potentially) toward the professional ranks. A boy's position at West-Side football academy, therefore, was unlike their position at school. That is, school was thought of as compulsory and education considered a right, whereas being at West-Side football academy was neither of these. Boys were free to discontinue their attendance,²⁶ and I documented a number of times when poor behaviour by an individual or group of boys led to a coach reminding them of what a 'privilege' it was to be at West-Side.

Moreover, it was no secret that poor performance and progression over a period of time typically results in having one's access to coaching and games at the football academy being terminated, or "being released" as it is known in the industry. While conducting a player-review with a boy and his parents (much like a school parent-evening), a colleague described to them his perspective on the reality of being at a professional football club like West-Side, which operated in what he called an "elitist" industry. "It's part and parcel of being in an elitist football programme," he said. "If the boys aren't pushing on every season and progressing then they might not come back the next year, unfortunately."

The threat of being discarded runs like a thread through the experience of boys at West-Side academy: it is woven into the design of institutional life in this setting. Even though they are "signed," which may give them a small sense of security and confidence, the following excerpts from interviews with academy players demonstrate

²⁶ Of course, West-Side's most-promising players could not freely discontinue their registration if their intention was to "sign" for another professional team as this would represent the loss of a club asset. In such instances, the other professional club would be required to pay the original club a monetary sum of "compensation."

boys' knowledge that their participation at West-Side hangs continuously in the balance, and that their participation must become more serious and more intense with each season:

I think from the club, when you're a bit younger they're a bit easier on you, try to get you going, but when you hit 14s, 15s, they power it into you, like this is serious and you need to put the best into it. And that everything you do counts.

After I signed I felt like that gave me confidence and I played really well after that, in the months til the end of the season, there was that buzz, but my dad was like just cos they signed you doesn't mean they can't release you so you need to keep working hard.

At the start of under 14s I got into my head that every training session, like cos I said to myself every training session could be my last, so I've gotta try my hardest, and ever since then I've got it into my head that I need to try my best.

Essentially, no boy is guaranteed their place at West-Side football academy: a mantra repeatedly "powered into" them. Evoking the image of the staff in Goffman's asylums watching inmates closely to ensure obedience and linking to neoliberal rationalities of productivity and the production of efficient workers, coaches I spoke to during my time at West-Side were keen to reiterate the importance of keeping boys "on their toes" and not letting them get "comfortable." "If we don't keep on at 'em," one coach told me, "then they'll forget why they're here. They'll think they've made it and they'll slack off."

6.5 "IT PUTS STRICT RULES ON HOW YOU THINK": PROFESSIONALISM AND CONFORMITY AT WEST-SIDE ACADEMY

...a person's line of activity may be subjected to regulations and judgements by staff; the inmate's life is penetrated by constant sanctioning interaction from above, especially during the initial period of stay before the inmate accepts the regulations unthinkingly.

– Goffman (1961, p.43)

They teach you responsibilities, like if you turn up late then, like to a meeting or for an away game, you won't play, and if you're not dressed correctly you won't play, so I think it puts like strict rules on how you think.

– West-Side Academy Player

As Goffman (1961) notes above, and as the interview extract above suggests, through a regulation of activity, institutions can play an important role in shaping how people feel and act. This is also reflected in the work of Hughes and Coakley (1991) who have

highlighted the tendency of athletes to 'over-conform' to an internalised sense of the 'sport ethic'; that is, what they believe is expected of them to be successful in their sport. Hughes and Coakley (1991) suggested that athletes become socialised into a sport ethic, wherein they more readily sacrifice aspects of their lives, often their own bodies and health (c.f. Sabo, 1998; Sabo and Panepinto, 1990; Messner, 1990; Messner and Sabo, 1994), so that they will be thought of as 'true competitors.' Drawing similarities to this body of work, others (e.g. Roderick, 2006a) have highlighted the importance among professional footballers to be thought of as possessing a 'good attitude,' and it is in this regard that I highlight how youth footballers at West-Side academy were encouraged to conform to the ethic of 'professionalism' and what some staff at West-Side described as being 'low-maintenance'.

A field note I created after one academy player's review meeting is revealing of how academy players are expected to conduct themselves and self-present (c.f. Goffman, 1959) in the context of West-Side football club. Review meetings generally took place twice a year with each boy, and represented what Goffman (1961) might call an institutional ceremony and an opportunity for coaches (of which there were two per age group) to highlight both 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' in a boy's football development. In these meetings, boys and their parent(s)/guardian(s) attend. In this particular meeting, I am sat on one side of a small table with my co-coach. One of the senior academy coaches also sits in on the review. He has also coached this particular boy and says he would like to have some input, so he joins us. He sits on the same side of the table: three coaches sat facing this 13-year-old boy and his mother as they enter the room, walk up the table and take a seat before us. During the review, the boy is given much praise. In games his performances have generally been of a good standard. We highlight some areas where he could make some improvements. My senior coaching colleague takes up the mantle: he describes a scenario that the boy may face in the near future. Drawing on my field notes to recall the scenario, it went something like this.

In this scenario, there are two boys, both West-Side academy players. They are approaching the Under-16 age group and the academy manager will soon be deciding which boys will receive a 'scholarship': the opportunity to train full time at West-Side

and a progress a step closer toward a professional contract at West-Side football club. Both boys, the coach suggests, are similarly talented. The first boy is always on time to training, his boots polished, and shirt tucked in. This boy greets the coaches with a smile and a handshake, he helps them with the kit, often without them asking, he thanks the coach for the training session, he asks the coach what he can work on, he is on time for the bus for away games, he gets on with the other boys, he does not get told off by the coach for talking when the coach is talking, he does not get told off for kicking footballs around when the coach is trying to collect the kit in at the end of the session. The second boy sometimes does these things, but mostly the opposite. He sulks when he is left out of the starting line-up for the Sunday game. He moans about doing a certain practice drill at training. He asks too many questions about how to do a drill that the coach has done with them 'a million times before.' The boy sat in the review with the three coaches facing him smiles slightly, knowingly, and looks down. It seems that he has 'got the message.' My senior coaching colleague continues, and clarifies that 'we' would call the first boy "low-maintenance" and the second boy "high-maintenance."

"Who do you think will get that scholarship place?" The senior coach asks the boy. My impression is that this is less a question but more rhetorical and *telling* the boy, urging him, demanding from him that he needs to be 'low-maintenance' if he wants to stand the best chance of progressing further at West-Side. "The first one," the boy answers. This observation highlights, as Goffman (1961, p.63) has noted, part of the process by which the "inmate" is requested and made to feel obliged to take a more disciplined line and "convert" to the institutional view, "presenting himself as someone whose institutional enthusiasm is always at the disposal of the staff."

Further highlighting the ways that some boys did not want to get reputations as irritating, high-maintenance, and lacking understanding, one academy player at West-Side told me in an interview:

You feel that with managers sometimes, when you talk to managers sometimes, they say something to you and they'll say it but you actually don't understand, you go along with it like you do understand and you might understand then but then you walk off and you go what did they say then, cos I had that a lot of times, my dad would be like what happened then so what did they pull you off and speak

to you and I'd be like oh crap and I wouldn't, like we'd train and someone would pull me off to the side and spoke to me and then if I thought if I understood it I'd remember, but then if I was like yeah yeah cos I wanted to go back and train, you'd be saying yes just to get away from them, I'd be saying yes to go back and train, I understand, you walk off and you do a little jog and the rest of it then woah what did they say again, you don't wanna go back cos then they'll be like weren't you listening to me, you're just like oh alright then and then you dont wanna ask again.

When I followed up on why he did not ask again, he said: "Well, it's not very good to keep asking cos you look stupid, and they might think you're stupid or don't listen." In this example, it seemed that this boy's decision not to return to his coach to ask further questions about what was expected of him was tied into not wanting to admit his own lack of understanding, and a worry that this would reveal his own forgetfulness (or lack of paying attention/information retention). Similarly, in another interview, one of the boys suggested that, from his perspective, asking for 'too much' time off from training or games was not a good way to endear you with academy coaches. He said:

Well you don't wanna go and choose to do something else over a match cos that'll give you a bad name with the managers, so that's a pressure, but also you don't wanna miss out like loads of things with the family, like I have I missed out on loads of birthdays, family holidays, like trips.

In ways like this a discourse of being 'low-maintenance', closely tied to the concept of being 'professional', loomed over boys at West-Side. Family holidays and birthdays that had not ever been missed were now skipped for training sessions and academy games. "It's important," the same boy told me, "something you just do, just get on with, cos you wanna get a good name and that could get you a scholar and then a pro." Noticeable in the above observations and interviews extracts, is how the potentiality of achieving a financial pay-off (or wage) in the future – when the 'scholars' (scholarships) and 'pros' professional contracts are handed out – is drawn on by some West-Side academy players to justify their over-conformity (c.f. Hughes and Coakley, 1991) to the expectations of their coaches and to their own idea of being 'professional'.

Other observations supported the idea that boys in West-Side academy were encouraged by coaches to conform to certain 'standards,' and to present themselves in particular ways. Similarly to the inmates of Goffman's institutions (1961, p.45), academy players could not easily escape from the judgements and constraints of

academy staff, authority that was “directed to a multitude of items of conduct – dress, deportment, manners...” In this sense, West-Side academy took on the role of a “finishing school” in which staff sought to “convert” boys to align with the official or staff view of the ‘perfect’ academy player. For example, concerning dress standards, boys at West-Side academy would regularly be told to tuck their shirts in when training or playing, as (they were told by coaches) this looked “untidy” and “sloppy.” In one example from my field notes, a boy was called to the side of the field while his teammates continued playing, and told to tuck his shirt in. “C’mon, standards,” the coach told him. In the winter months boys were told to take off any “silly hats” (bobble hats) when out on the field practicing, and when boys wore brightly coloured gloves (bright pink and green) this was commented on as looking “unprofessional” by some coaches. However, there was no club policy that prevented boys from doing so, and West-Side offered no cold-weather gear of this sort as an alternative to boys’ own choices.

This was something which jarred with me and brought to mind Goffman’s (1961, p.44) description of a concentration camp, where “...keeping hands in pockets in cold weather; turning up the coat collar in the wind or rain...unshined shoes...The slightest deviation in dressing ranks and files...any of these might provoke a savage outburst.” I felt uncomfortable with telling boys to take off ‘silly’ hats and gloves that did not conform to the ‘professional’ standards of senior staff at West-Side academy. To me it seemed arbitrary, and the times I did enforce these codes of dress and self-presentation, I felt that I achieved little more than demonstrating my authority over the boys.

Boys were expected to wear the ‘right’ kit; that is, academy players were issued with t-shirt, shorts, socks, jumper, and raincoat – all their training kit was emblazoned with the West-Side Football Club badge. Not wearing the assigned kit to training would inevitably draw a comment from an academy coach about why a boy was not wearing the correct kit; among coaches I spoke to privately in the field, it was viewed as disorganised, untidy, and coaches commented that it generally looked unprofessional. In brief, they valued a form of self-presentation that was tied to conformity with the group. On some occasions, as I also described in the preface to this thesis, coaches

would sometimes issue ‘fines’ (an institutional “punishment” in Goffman’s vocabulary) to boys who did not attend training or matches wearing the club-issued kit. While at the professional level this would mean paying a cash fine, at academy age groups (since they were not earning a wage) this meant the offending boy would bring in sweets or chocolate for the coach at the next training session. Sometimes the coach would distribute these to the other boys in the group at the end of a training session to the delight of the other boys. This was not an academy policy. Instead it was initiated by individual coaches themselves at a sub-cultural level: it was part of the under-life of the institution. For example, it was not something that I enforced with my own group of academy players. When I ‘took over’ the coaching duties for this current group, at the beginning of the season they regularly enforced it on each other: “Fine!” they would shout, for various ‘offences’, but this seemed to tail off without having a coach support the ‘accusations.’ Without institutional backing (by academy coaches), the behaviour seemed to dissipate. The rationale of coaches who did enforce ‘fines’, however, was (they told me in general conversations) that the boys “won’t get away with it as a scholar”. In this regard, coaches perceived as necessary the conditioning and disciplining of boy’s bodies, and how they present themselves; indeed, the ‘fine’ system utilised by some coaches was represented, as one coach noted, as “for their own good.” When I mentioned that I had not been enforcing a fine system, this same West-Side academy coach added: “You should, really. It’s good for their standards...We’re not doing them any favours if we let them get away with things early on [at younger age groups].”

6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed boys at West-Side as (potential) economic assets to the club. The language used to describe the boys in this setting (as gems, diamonds, and ‘worth a bit of money’), is reflective of a neoliberal-rationality adopted by coaches at West-Side, and this language establishes a clear picture of boys’ market-driven value and worth in this setting. This language, in which boys are discussed as materials to be worked on and shaped into marketable assets, makes sense in the context of society in which neoliberal ideology dominates, and in the context of what a football academy is designed to do: produce professional footballers for the benefit of that club (either to help the first team or to be sold on for profit). Central

to this first empirical chapter is the idea that – as an institution wedded to a marketplace and economic doctrine in which the accumulation of capital is the marker of “success,” and organised around ‘mining’ the surrounding communities and producing a few precious commodities – West-Side football academy is *always looking for someone better*. The embeddedness of this culture of competition is spelled out by boys themselves, with competition and insecurity framing their academy experience. Given the elite, organised, competitive and commercial nature of modern sport institutions and their deep connection to market values and ideals (c.f. Coakley, 2011), the findings from this chapter may have traction in thinking about the experiences of boys in other football academies.

This first empirical chapter has been crafted as a way to describe the broader culture of West-Side football academy and the broader neoliberal rationalities which foreground the idea of professional football academies nationally, and to flesh-out some of the ways that an institution (such as a professional football club academy) and its key stakeholders and ‘kingmakers’ (e.g. coaches) might influence the ways that participants in the institution (e.g. youth players) come to think, feel and act. Importantly, football academies are constructed by people. They serve a purpose; that is, in reworking Critcher’s analysis of sport (1988, p.206), “[football academies] are what they have been made to be.” Moreover, reworking Coakley (2011) *football academies* do not just happen. Football academies have arisen at the same time as a particular ideological perspective known as neoliberalism. As a mechanism or manifestation of contemporary elite, organised, competitive, commercial sport, West-Side football academy is a clear example of neoliberal social practice and a product of market principles – that is, West-Side football academy functions as an attempt to protect and grow marketable assets in order to provide a profitable ‘pipeline’ of productive bodies into the professional game. Thus, nourishing and sustaining West-Side’s own asset-profile and the professional football industry as a whole.

This brings me to my second empirical chapter and questions that extend from the ideas presented above around how coaches at West-Side are potentially important sources of information and knowledge about how to ‘become’ a professional footballer: that is, in shaping boys ideas around what it means to be ‘professional’, to have ‘good

standards, and to behave in ways that please (or, at least, do not displease) their coaches. If coaches at West-Side are influential in these respects, then how might they shape (or try to shape) boy's ideas about what it means to be a man? This is the focus I now take up in CHAPTER SIX and SEVEN. Subsequently in CHAPTER EIGHT and CHAPTER NINE I look at the extent to which the social organisation of West-Side and the ways masculinities are represented might be reflected in boys' peer relationships and their attitudes toward homosexuality.

CHAPTER 7: “MORNING, LADIES:” EVERYDAY REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY AMONG COACHES AND BOYS AT WEST-SIDE

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The bus is supposed to leave West-Side academy at 7.45am. It's now 7.48am. Three under-12 boys make their way swiftly toward the team bus. The driver helps them to load their bags into the luggage-hold of the vehicle. They move to the door of the bus and climb the stairs. Their coach, sat in the first row of seats smiles, greets them. “Morning, ladies,” he says. “You’re late: busy doing your hair was it?” They smile, acknowledge their coach, say “Morning,” and “Sorry we’re late.” They board the bus and shuffle to the back of the bus. They sit down. The driver closes the door, tells everyone over the PA system to put their belts on, and the bus pulls away from West-Side academy onto the road.

Coaches at West-Side academy did not use homophobic language towards other coaches or academy players, yet their ‘banter’ often did incorporate more subtle markers of gender and masculinity. Highlighting the regularity of ‘banter’ at West-Side, when discussed the above “ladies” extract with one academy player in an interview, he told me: “There was a lot of joking and banter like that, like almost every time you went in really.”

In Goffman’s (1961) study of institutional life, interactions between “staff” and “inmates” were viewed as important in understanding the ways that “membership” of that institution may degrade, curtail or “mortify” the individual’s self, shaping them into an object that aligns more closely with the values of that establishment. Goffman (1961, p.24) refers to a process of “mortification:” borrowing from two other words used by Goffman, the process of mortification can be understood as a process of “untraining” (p.22) and (re-)“programming” (p.26), that is, a change in beliefs and self-conception such that cooperativeness from the “recruit” is achieved. In this sense, the interactions between coaches and academy players presented in this chapter (drawn from my field notes), is potentially revealing of the institutional ‘culture’ of West-Side academy in which boys were being ‘developed’.

The extract presented above, for example, illustrates how seemingly innocuous interactions can be textured with gendered language on a daily basis. This is the focus in this chapter: to utilise Goffman's terminology, a kind of *masculine* mortification, wherein boys are 'worked on', 'shaped' and 'coded' into (masculinised) objects that can be fed into the 'machinery' of the football academy, and wider society. While I felt that 'homophobic' language (discussed in CHAPTER NINE) was more easily identifiable (in terms of its pernicious 'intent' – c.f. McCormack, 2012), I have also documented in this chapter a number of everyday interactions that were imbued with gendered and masculine 'narratives' and which were delivered in a more 'subtle' fashion. In the above extract, the interaction between academy coach and academy players draws comparisons with what I have previously discussed as *masculinity-establishing language* (c.f. Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010). The effect of greeting boys as "ladies" and connecting this to a possible pre-occupation with something typically associated as feminine, 'doing their hair,' is that it seeks to position them as feminine, and by implication, not masculine. While the motivation of this coach's use of masculinity-establishing language is not clear (since I did not ask him), it is possible that he would describe it as friendly 'banter' and not intended to harm (indeed, Goffman notes that mortification may often be unintentional). And while this may be the case (the boys smiled and did not seem upset at being called "ladies"), I highlight in this chapter how similar narratives (around gender and masculinity), were activated in conversations between coaches and boys at West-Side.

These (mortifying) moments went unnoticed, unchallenged, and – given the *echelon* authority of coaches at West-Side (c.f. Goffman, 1961, p.46) – may form implicit representations of masculinity; that is, they may present boys with particular ideas about how boys should act or *be*. I describe these representations of masculinity as 'subtle', because unlike homophobic epithets, nobody seemed to be offended or care. Importantly, as Goffman (1961, p.50) highlights, mortification or curtailment of the self is not always perceived by "inmates" as stressful or anxiety-inducing: that is, rather than enrage inmates the coaches' 'banter' may please them and provide some relief from the stress of the setting. Exemplifying this, coaches' banter imbued with masculine representations went unchallenged and more often than not drew smiles

from their ‘targets.’ Boys perhaps understood (or had learned or were being taught through this process) the irony of being called girls. They ‘got the joke,’ since they understood they were boys, *not* girls. Perhaps as Parker (2001) has noted previously of young men in a football academy, they had already learned that it was important to ‘take’ the banter, without losing their cool.

In these moments, while I acknowledge my own passivity (and complicity) in not challenging the underlying assumptions of this language, it made me wonder if anyone else noticed this language, felt uncomfortable with it, or wondered how it might play a role in shaping boys’ own ideas about what it means to *be a man*. Writing this chapter now, I wonder what the (re)action of the academy manager would have been if I had raised with him the issue of boys being greeted as “ladies.” Though I do not know for sure, since I did not bring it up at the time, my gut feeling is that I doubt it would have been considered as a serious issue. The language seemed to inhabit a ‘grey area’ between homophobia and sexism. If it was not ‘aimed at’ gay people or women, then what did it matter? Who was it hurting?

In this chapter, I take a look at how ideas about what it means to be a man were layered into everyday life at West-Side, and communicated and sustained in this professional football academy context. My study of West-Side academy, as introduced in the extract above and illustrated in the multiple extracts of data presented below, gives a glimpse of how cultural markers of masculinity were intertwined with the everyday experiences of being an academy footballer on the road to becoming a professional footballer. Below, in a number of short ‘stories’ from my field notes I present a number of ways masculinity was represented. The purpose in presenting the data in this way is to provide a feeling of being in the setting. Even though I have organised the data under subheadings as part of my own analysis, the purpose here is to allow the reader (to some extent) to make their own judgements about these moments. At the end of the chapter, I then offer my own analysis of how these observations might be ‘read’.

7.2 “HE’S TOUGH AND HE GETS WOMEN”

Three age groups of West-Side academy boys occupy a 50-foot, 55-seater vehicle with lavatory and luggage hold where the teams’ kit is stored for the journey. A sign at the

front of the bus reads “West-Side Football Club” and is visible through the front windscreen of the bus, announcing the presence of the West-Side academy to onlookers and on our arrival at our destination. The boys have organised themselves with the oldest age group occupying the seats toward the rear of the bus and the youngest age groups sat toward the front end, just behind their academy coaches (including me) sat in the front three rows of seats. While some of the older boys (from my “squad”) switch seats occasionally and move to the front of the bus to quieter seats to listen to music through headphones or close their eyes to try and sleep a little, this is a typical distribution of passengers on “away” journeys.

Today, we are travelling ‘away’ to play against the academy boys of another professional club, a few hours driving time from West-Side’s ‘home’ fields. Away trips are long and tiresome days, and this away trip (we need to arrive there at 10:00 for an 11:00 kick-off time) means a 07:45 (am) leave from West-Side. Some of the boys and their parents have mentioned that this meant they were up at 05:45 (am) this morning, so they could have a decent breakfast and get to the pick-up point in West-Side in good time. As one academy player told me in an interview:

Early mornings are hard work. When you have to get up for the match, especially from here to get up at five-thirty, six, go over there, catch the bus, then you have to warm up and it’s just hard. When the West-Side lot can wake up at like seven and then go meet at half-seven, where I have to get up at half-five, travel, and then, it affects you mental, cos you go to warm up and then you’re too tired cos you’ve done car travel, bus travel, you’ve woken up earlier than everyone else, and you’re just too tired to start warming up but you’ve gotta try your best to get into it.

The bus rumbles along the motorway. All-in-all, for some boys, this trip will entail something like an eight-hour round-trip to take part in a competitive match lasting 80-minutes. Two or three of the boys might get to play the full 80-minutes, but the majority of the fourteen-strong group that are travelling to this game will be on the field for 60-70 minutes. To pass the time, the coaches at the front of the bus chat and play DVDs on a small TV monitor mounted at the front of the vehicle. The DVDs tend to be either highlight-reels showing, for example, *The Best 100 Goals of All Time*, or some ‘inspiring’ American sports movie, for example: *Remember the Titans* (American Football), *The Mighty Ducks* (Ice Hockey), or *The Rookie* (Baseball). Today, despite

having seen it numerous times, we watch a DVD showing all the goals from the previous World Cup. Some of the boys move forward on the bus, taking up the seats closer to the TV where they can watch the DVD, too.

Some boys from the under-10 age group team are sat close by, in seats just behind me. The boys talk excitedly about the skills used to score the goals and what they thought the best goal was and why. Turning in my seat, I join in the conversation, addressing these young 'lads.'

AA: So, who's your favourite player in the world then, lads?

Each of the boys gives their answer, some shout out two or three names each and I don't really hear any of them as they drown each other out. I pick out one of the boys, making eye contact.

AA: Who was that you said?

He repeats his answer.

AA: And why's that?

U10: 'Cos he's a good defender.

I try to coax a bit more information from him.

AA: What makes him a good defender?

U10: He can tackle well and makes loads of blocks...throws himself in the way. No one gets by him.

Some of the other boys are listening too and agree. The boy thinks, continues.

U10: And he's tough. He shouts at his teammates, organises them. Puts his head in and he might get hurt but he does it for his team. That's a good thing...

He trails off in his answer. Another boy adds excitedly: "And he gets women, too!"

This makes the boy's teammates laugh and they continue talking about who their favourite professional players are and they argue about which of them "gets the most women." I turn back into my seat to face the TV, take out my notepad and pen (normal for a coach on a bus trip like this) and write down some field notes about the conversation. I note that this might be an example of what being a man means to these boys, and underline the words in my notepad: *He's tough* and *he gets women*.

7.3 “YOU NEED TO BE TOUGHER”

The half-time whistle blows and we’re losing this game 4-2. The group of Under-14s I am coaching today (with another coach) are playing at home against another professional club academy. The boys are walking over to us for the break. A senior coaching colleague, who is walking between fields and offering ‘advice’ to the coaches and players of various age groups, has been watching the game for the last fifteen minutes. Demonstrating what Goffman (1961, p. 46) has called the echelon authority of institutions, wherein any member of staff has the right to discipline any member of the inmate class, as the boys *walk* off the field, my senior colleague calls the boys to *jog* in, *don’t walk*. “Jog in then lads, c’mon, you haven’t done enough to be walking have you?” he says. When the boys have had a drink, we (both me and my co-coach) offer our thoughts. We ask the boys opinion on how they think things are going, we listen to their thoughts and offer our own. We encourage, and make some substitutions (changes to who is playing) to ensure everyone is getting equal playing time. Once we finish what we have to say, our senior colleague steps in, uninvited. I look at my co-coach: both of us have been coaching a number of years, but this coach has been here many more years. We catch each other’s eye; raise our eyebrows as if to say “what’s going on here?”

We step back, we watch and listen. He proceeds to confront them about their ‘poor’ performance. First, what he says makes me feel protective towards ‘my boys’: I don’t feel they deserve the criticism. There have been some positives, and these academy games are supposed to be about learning and development rather than winning (no centralised record is kept of academy results and there is no ‘league’ like at the professional levels). Second, his ‘team talk’ provides a telling example of this coach’s individual beliefs about masculinity in relation to football performance, and how he perceives the role of footballer should be ‘done’. He tells the boys his thoughts on how he thinks they have played so far. “You’re letting them walk all over you at the moment,” he says. “If you want to get something out of this game today, you need to be tougher all over the pitch and start winning your individual battles.”

Most of the boys are wearing thermal undershirts, or ‘skins’ as they call them. It’s a mild day in February. One of those winter mornings when the sun is shining brightly,

but the air still crisp. I'm wearing a thermal 'skin' underneath my coaching kit, too. Providing an example of what Goffman (1961, p.30) has described as the requirement for institutionalised members to "stand at attention" to staff authority and to adopt movements or postures that may mortify their selves, the coach continues his 'motivational' team-talk: "You're too soft at the moment, lads." In what might be equated with what Goffman (1961, p.26) has called an "obedience test," the coach picks out one of the boys and tells him to take his thermal undershirt off. I want to say something but I don't. I let him continue. "Take that stupid thing off," he commands, essentially challenging the boy to take the role of compliant institutional member. According to Goffman, obedience tests are moments of socialisation and can even be thought of as "will-breaking" contests (ibid, p.26): "inmates" can either show defiance and risk punishment or show deference and "hold his peace forever."

The boy does as he is told and removes his undershirt. "All of you," the coach adds. "Get those things off. If you want to keep warm then you need to start working harder and run around a bit more." In my field notes, I note that I did not interrupt him or tell the boys to keep their undershirts on as I did not want to create a scene and undermine the instructions (and perhaps echelon authority) of a colleague. None of the boys argue with him. They all remove their 'skins' on the side of the field. The coach sends them back out onto the field. I say nothing and take a few steps away down the touchline of the field. Reflecting on this moment, I think on some level I didn't want to be associated with him and the manner in which he used his authority, although by staying quiet in the moment I also acknowledge my complicity in this example of coercion or mortification.

In a similar vein, another interaction that I observed and recorded as field notes before leaving the academy training facility outlines further the notion of 'toughness' that some coaches seemed to value in this setting. Once again reflective of Goffman's (1961) mortification and degradation of self, the following observation involves one of the under-12 goalkeepers at the academy. "Lads, you gotta see this," shouts one of the academy coaches, as we are leaving the training pitch. "Go on mate, show 'em your little things," he encourages a young goalkeeper to show some of the other coaches (including me) the hand-warmers he had been keeping in his pockets for this evening's

session. The hand-warmers are the kind you can heat up in the microwave before going outside, radiating heat which can be used to warm your hands.

The young goalkeeper smiles. Some other boys are now gathered around. Perhaps indirectly mortifying the young goalkeeper, the coach, directing his question to the goalkeeper coach, says, "What's going on with 'keepers these days? They've gone all soft!" The goalkeeper coach returns the 'banter', defending his young protégé, "Not soft mate, just smart, you wish you had some!" "Not really, bit gay isn't it," the coach says. "Wouldn't catch me with them." Defending the young goalkeeper further, the goalkeeper coach adds: "But you wear gloves, a hat, thermals, a massive coat, and you're not diving on the floor every minute." Smiling, he continues: "...and you've got a good layer of body fat mate, give the kid a break." He pats the other coach on the belly. The other coaches (including myself) who are now stood close by laugh at this, and the young goalkeeper also smiles again.

The goalkeeper coach looks to the young goalkeeper and says: "Take no notice of him, well done tonight, you do what you need to do to prepare and keep working on what we talked about." "Yeah I was only kidding," adds the coach "...good lad, see you next week." The young goalkeeper, still smiling, acknowledges both coaches and jogs away to his parents.

During a training practice, two 14-year old boys compete for possession of the football. One boy looks like he has the ball, then the other looks like he is in control. They tussle shoulder to shoulder until one of the boys is eased off the ball and tumbles to the floor (the contact here is within the laws of the game). Some of the boy's teammates comment that he needs to "get on the weights." They describe the boy who knocked him down as "a beast" and "a tank." In admiration of this act of physical domination, an observing coach turns to me and notes: "He's got a bit of bite about him hasn't he?"

The boy on the ground stays there, momentarily, then begins to drag himself slowly back to his feet, with hands on knees. "Be tough," the coach next to me shouts to the boy. "Up you get." The boy stands up straight, and walks, then begins to jog again and rejoins the practice. The coach shouts to him "You ok?" The boy signals yes with a

thumbs up. He is ok, sore but not injured. The coach, in jest, says, “You need to get in the gym, my son.” The boy smiles, too. He continues to play.

Goffman’s notion of *people-work* is useful here in explicating what is going on in these moments. People-work is the idea that people are materials to be worked on, and that institutional staff must ‘work on’ members to shape and code them into objects that will fit more easily into the machinery of the establishment. Highlighting how some boys need to be ‘worked on’, the coach turns to me, and comments on this boy. “He’s too soft,” he says. “Need to toughen him up a bit if he’s gonna have a chance [of making it as a professional].”

This interaction makes sense in the context of what Goffman (1961) outlines as an institution, since the objective of most (total) institutions is to enforce particular activities, behaviours and feelings to align members’ conduct to fulfil the official aims of the institution: at West-Side, this is the conversion of boys into (strong, tough) professional footballers.

Highlighting this point further, the same coach then commented on the other boy in the (shoulder to shoulder) challenge who “used his body well” to physically dominate, describing him as having a “nasty streak” and praises his ability to “mix it up.” “You need lads like that who are gonna fight and scrap when it’s needed.” Later, in my field notes, I note that I thought interactions of this kind were perhaps revealing of the esteeming of physical forms of capital in the academy setting.

7.4 “THEY SHOULDN’T BE CRYING, THAT’S WHAT GIRLS DO”

At the West-Side academy training centre some coaches were gathered in the locker area to warm-through and change into dry clothes. The rain had been coming down heavily; powered by gusts of wind, the icy droplets had been hitting us sideways-on for most of the evening. “How was your session?” one coach asks another. It becomes apparent that some of the boys in a younger group had begun to cry outside in the wind and rain during the session and their coach, kicking off his sopping boots remarks that: “They need to toughen up.” He seems frustrated by what he has just experienced. “They’re only kids though, mate,” another coach says.

The response was “Yeah, but some of them get on with it, but like those two, they fall on the floor and get a bit wet and then they’re crying like girls and just give in for the rest of it. You’ve gotta be tougher than that.” When asked by another coach on whether the boys were wearing appropriate kit for the weather, the coach concedes they probably were not but remains unsatisfied that this is sufficient cause for their tears. He finishes putting on his dry trainers, tucking the laces into the shoes and slipping his feet in. “They still shouldn’t be crying though, that’s what girls do!”

After a home game a group of coaches convene for a “coach’s meeting” in the clubhouse. The boys have all changed and left and the coaches have settled down in the “coaches’ area” for tea and coffee. My field notes highlight how some coaches seemed to disregard those boys on their teams who broke masculine norms (for example, by crying). All the coaches were making notes about the day’s games; and this made it easy for me to do the same, noting key sentences, words and phrases alongside notes about player performance and team tactics. In this meeting of the coaches in the clubhouse, one of the academy coaches offers his analysis of the performance of one of the trialists in his team, a twelve year-old boy;

“He did really well today,” the coach comments to the group. Some other coaches nod and chatter with those sat close to them. Approximately six coaches are in the room; some are sat on chairs, while others are perched on tables and worktops that hug the perimeter of the room. Another coach pitches in with his assessment of the same boy’s football abilities: “Yeah I really liked him, too. Until he cried twice right at the end there. Seems a bit soft.”

While there is some contestation of this statement (one coach remarks that some top international players have cried on TV after losing a game, but they are still good players), the general feeling in the room is one of agreement that the boy is a bit “soft” and probably wouldn’t be able to cope with the demands of professional football. Below, building on narratives about boys being soft, I offer some observations about the way that narratives around “being a girl,” “being like a girl,” and “being girly” were used by some coaches in their interactions with the young academy players.

7.5 “THAT WAS A BIT GIRLY!”

My first example of this type of narrative comes from an observation made during a practice game between the boys that I was coaching and the age-group below. The coaches of this other group had come over to stand and watch the game. When a ball came in high and it looked like one of the boys was going to control the ball on his chest, at the last second he moved his arms in front of him, seemingly having misjudged the flight of the ball. He patted the ball down with his hands. One of the coaches from the other team, who was officiating the game from the sideline, gave a free kick; by the laws of the game using one's hands is an infringement in the game of association football. As the referee (one of the other coaches) blew his whistle signalling the infringement, one of the coaches stood next to me shouted on to the boys. “That was a bit girly! Free kick to the other team for being so girly!”

This drew some laughs from the boy's teammates. The boy sprinted quickly back into his position to defend the free kick that had just been given against him, and the game continued.

In another field note, I observed one boy receive some ‘banter’ from a coach for wearing pink boots, recently purchased. “Whoa, what are those mate?” the coach asked. The boy smiles, again highlighting how boys quite enjoyed these interactions with coaches, perhaps drawing them closer into academy life: as Goffman notes (1961, p.63), “the staff who try to make life in total institutions more bearable must face the possibility that doing so may increase the attractiveness and likelihood of colonization.” The likely intention of the coach's question was to highlight the colour of the boots in front of the boy's peers: to jokingly degrade or mortify. Since his teammates have seen the boots before and most wear brightly coloured boots themselves (some have pink boots too), most appear uninterested, but are enjoying the ‘ribbing’ he is getting from the coach. Quickly, while he has the attention of the crowd of boys, the coach, stone-faced, follows up his question with another; “Are these why you kick like a girl then?” Some of the group of boys smile, as does the boy with the pink boots, and then the coach smiles too— the boy does not look embarrassed about his pink boots and he continues to wear them throughout the season. It is a fleeting “mortifying” moment although one in which both academy boys and their coaches seem, on face value, to

enjoy the “banter” – it put a smile on the boy’s faces and they continued without much more being made of it. From a team dynamics perspective, perhaps it can be read as an attempt by coaches to ‘connect’ with the young boys they coach and improve group morale. However, from a masculinities perspective, it can also be read as a moment that invokes a comparison with and distancing from girlhood (and by association, femininity), and the way girls ‘do’ football, highlighting the subtle surveillance or monitoring of masculine boundaries in this setting. Below I illustrate one more example from my field notes of this narrative in action.

One of the boys in a younger age group had shoulder length hair and often wore an elastic hair band in training and during games, to keep his hair from being in his face while he played. Commenting on his hair, there were a few different coaches who liked to ‘give him banter.’ Always in a ‘joking’ and non-aggressive way, I observed various coaches say to the boy (on multiple occasions throughout the season), “I’m worried about you with that long hair, mate,” before making a point of commenting on how long it was and how people might mistake him for a girl.

While there are no formal rules about the length of hair that boys can keep at West-Side, hair length and style is often commented upon by coaches and boys alike; serving to create an informal norm about how boys should keep their hair. After making this comment, one coach then told me later, “He’ll get it cut off soon.” Furthermore, he observed that, “It’s fine, and I’ve got no problem with it, but boys with long hair who keep it like that as they get older are asking to get bullied. That’s just the way it is.” Joking that he sounded jealous that his own hairline was rapidly receding was my subtle effort to contest this view. He laughed, playing along and conceding that this was probably true; “Yeah, can’t mistake me for a girl can you?”

7.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, I have built on the findings presented in the previous chapter by continuing to examine the institutional culture and context of a professional football club youth academy, specifically the use of language by the coaching staff at West-Side. To do this, I have drawn on the work of Goffman (1961) on institutions and on the process of mortification – that is the ways in which “inmates” (members of the

institution) are shaped and coded by a series of “degradations” and “humiliations” to align with institutional aims and objectives. The explicit aim of the football academy is to produce professional footballers, but the interactions highlighted in this chapter also suggest that another (perhaps unintentional) objective of coaches in this setting is to shape boys’ deportment, dress, and manner to align with their own gendered values.

Further to this, in line with the second part of my first research aim (p.18 of this thesis), I have drawn on my observations to describe a number of moments in the field in which ideas about what it means to be a man were revealed. While they did not do so aggressively, academy coaches at West-Side drew on a number of narratives about being tough and not being girly. Comments along these lines were predominantly framed as ‘banter’ but taking a step back and seeing these comments as part of a broader set of comments, they might be interpreted as variations on *masculinity-establishing discourse* described previously among university-aged football coaches (Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010); that is, as part of a wider framework of building meanings around what it means to be a man, and what it takes to be successful in the world of football. In Goffman-speak (1961), this might be understood as “untraining” and (re-)“programming” of one’s own conception of self and others. This is not to say that coaches do this as part of a conscious scheme to indoctrinate others; instead, the ways they represent masculinity and gender and engage in moments of (perhaps unintentional) mortification of others is suggestive of their own ideas about what it means to be a man.

Moreover, while it is not possible from this data to suggest a generational difference in understandings about gender and masculinity between adult male coaches and the young academy players, the data presented do suggest that coaches at West-Side gravitated toward (re)presenting masculinity in particular (orthodox, rather than inclusive) ways (c.f. Anderson, 2005), including the use of ‘girl’ and ‘ladies’ to describe some boys’ behaviour, and privately-espoused views on crying and the need for boys to be tough and ‘not soft’. There was some evidence that some boys at West-Side were developing (or had already developed) orthodox perspectives on what it means to be a man: for example, the young boy whose favourite professional player was “tough,” and “gets women.” My point here is that, while socialisation (towards orthodox

masculinity) should not be seen as one-way (there will be other influences on boys' lives and they may develop along different 'paths' and even reject the ideas of adults), in putting these ideas 'out there' through interactions with academy players, coaches at West-Side may be contributing to the way that boys think, feel and act as gendered beings.

The data in this chapter raises an important question: if the institutional mission or objective of professional football academies is to 'produce' professional footballers, then what kind of professional footballers (i.e. men) are produced by this hyper-competitive, profit-driven culture of insecurity that is also threaded through with gendered 'banter' and mortification and subtle hints at how to 'do' masculinity properly? Developing this line of thinking during my interviews with some of the boys at West-Side, it became evident that the competitive setting of West-Side academy played a role in shaping boys' peer relationships with one another. This reciprocally informed and shaped my second research aim: to develop an understanding of what being 'friends' means within the social parameters of boys' football academy experience. Thus, in CHAPTER EIGHT I explore the potential limitations (to peer-relationships and friendships) that participation in an institution such as West-Side football academy may be having on the lives of these young men

CHAPTER 8: “WE’RE MATES, BUT IT’S BUSINESS:” EMOTIONAL-PROXIMITY, TRUST, AND (IN)AUTHENTICITY IN BOYS’ FRIENDSHIPS AT WEST-SIDE FOOTBALL ACADEMY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As highlighted in the previous two findings chapters, West-Side academy players are embroiled in a social setting defined by competition (and insecurity), and in which reside a number of narratives about what it means to be a man. I have also described how boys at West-Side are subject to a number of processes of mortification and curtailments of the self (Goffman, 1961). In this chapter, I build on these previous chapters by exploring what ‘costs’ boys might incur from ‘buying-into’ and playing-out their lives in such a social setting. Goffman (1961, p.46), for example, has suggested that the colonizing ability of institutions may contribute to “inmates” forgoing sociability with fellows to avoid “trouble.” Moreover, Goffman writes (*ibid*, p.60) that, typically, “inmates” will not be able to rely on fellow inmates: since, as Goffman notes (*ibid*, p.61), “there is usually little group loyalty in total institutions...” Elsewhere, Magrath et al. (2013) have previously touched upon the peer-relationships between young men (16-19 year olds) in football academies, and Ommundsen et al. (2005) have identified *conflict* as a *typical* experience of young male soccer players in performance-oriented cultures, yet this topic remains underexplored at the younger academy age groups. Also of interest in relation to the data presented in this chapter, is Anderson’s (2009) discussion of ‘emotional proximity’ as an indicator of inclusive masculinities.

Cognizant of West-Side academy as (a) existing as part of a wider (hyper-competitive) professional football industry in which players’ bodies are conduits for profit-making, (b) a place where competition and insecurity rules, and (c) academic insight into ‘what matters’ in relation to the development and nourishment of intimate, reciprocal, emotionally-enduring and caring friendships for youth, this chapter problematises the utility of competitive sports in the process of ‘making friends’ and critically explores boys’ friendships in the context of a youth football academy. As such, this chapter addresses my second research aim (p.18 of this thesis). As an aside, the social setting being explored (a professional football academy), should be understood as a near-total

institution (c.f. Goffman, 1961), in which boys are focused on fame-making and ‘becoming professional,’ a setting in which friendships may be constructed differently than in grassroots football teams or adult non-professional yet still competitive ‘social-league’ teams. The findings presented in this chapter highlight some of the peculiarities of boys’ ‘friendships’ at West-Side academy, structured by the (hyper-competitive) context of the professional football industry, a setting in which ‘producing talent’ trumps everything.

8.2 NEGOTIATING FRIENDSHIPS *INSIDE* THE ACADEMY

The peer relationships and friendships that academy boys maintained ‘inside’ the academy was a central theme in the data. Academy ‘friendships’ were described as ‘less-deep’ than friendships outside of the academy and in my interpretation of the data this is linked to the following ideas: (a) boys did not ‘trust’ other academy boys to ‘go deeper’ into friendship with them, (b) there was a sense of ‘inauthenticity’ in that boys described a perpetual pressure to ‘perform’ in order to display their quality and provide moments of self-promotion within a myopic, hierarchical, and hyper-masculine field of judgement (i.e., friendships seemed to be constructed ‘around’ this inauthentic self, making the friendships feel ‘fake’), and (c) as described in CHAPTER SIX, other boys were structured into rivalry in the context of the academy and, thus, friendships were inevitably bound to the competitive “business” of being an academy player and the aspiration of becoming professional.

8.2.1 “PLAYING FOR PLACES:” THE COMPETITIVE BUSINESS OF ACADEMY FRIENDSHIPS

An avenue of exploration that provided a useful way of interpreting boys’ friendships inside the academy was through the comparisons they made with friendships outside of the academy. One academy player, George,²⁷ noted in an interview that, “Your mates back here [at home] are your mates, but you also call those lads at [West-Side] your mates too.” Reflecting on his time at West-Side academy and supporting some of the data presented in CHAPTER SIX on the competitiveness embedded into this establishment, George added:

²⁷ Here, I use names (pseudonyms) to make it easier for the reader to follow what each boy has said.

There's something about football where everyone is trying to get the edge on each other, I've never known why, it's just maybe that even though you were in a team, it was competitive, playing for places. I thought it was a sort of way to put you down, sort of like just to get the edge, to knock your confidence, cos even though they were doing it in a jokey way you sort of knew what they were doing, it's sort of like a tactic to get people down and not play as well even though you're on the same team.

Reflected in George's comments is the idea that other boys in the academy were 'rivals'. This was stated in a matter-of-fact fashion by many of the boys at West-Side. Quotations from interviews with academy players George, Kyle and Joel reflected a consciousness of the 'reality' of professional football, particularly when progressing towards the 'scholarship years' (at 16-years old) and the awarding of professional contracts (at 18-years old). It was part of the academy experience that new players would come in 'on trial' – remaining part of the group when professional contracts are on the horizon meant simply performing better than those around you. Highlighting the underlying sense of competition that boys felt as academy players at West-Side, Kyle jokingly told me that whenever a new boy comes to trial with the team, he will try to find out if they are in direct competition for a place. As Kyle notes:

Well firstly, I ask if he's in my position! Well, even if he is then I don't mind, but just I always like, cos I've been through the experience of not knowing anyone, and if he didn't even know anyone, even worse than me cos like I had some mates to come with me on trial, it was like, well, any trialist comes in now I just welcome them and go in groups with them and help them along really.

Further, highlighting the complexity of the competitive yet collaborative institutional context these boys are in, Kyle then tells me: "You just have to get on with it and try and be better than them but stay friends." While initially joking, Kyle's response provides a flavour of how boys perceived each other as threat to their own place at West-Side academy. In a similar vein, Joel told me:

At the end of the season a new lad came in, he's a good player...and he was starting in front of me, so that was a bit of a down for me...I thought I should be playing...coaches try and say 'don't worry'...but deep down you're thinking 'you shoulda put me on.' But you gotta smile and get your head down, I wanna try and improve and eventually I'll take his place....Things are different now to what they were a couple of years ago, it's a lot more serious now cos everyone's thinking 'Oh this could be a career,' and, um, 'I wanna make sure they [trialists] don't take my place,' but off the pitch I try and shake hands with them and say like, be welcoming and stuff, but on the pitch it's just...business.

These interview excerpts hint at the competitive social conditions and context of lived experiences against which ‘friendships’ are developed and nurtured in this academy setting. My interest in this section, cognizant of the fact that competitive sports are commonly identified by advocates as ‘great places to make friends,’ was to explore the peculiarities of ‘friendships’ *actually* formed inside academies.

Hinting at the inherent contradictions in the life of an academy footballer, where individuals are in competition with each other (ultimately for professional contracts) but simultaneously collaborate to achieve success “in a team,” Kyle notes that:

When you’re up the team [at West-Side] they [other academy players] all wanna be pushed, but you don’t wanna push each other too much in case they go ahead of you. Cos like you’re in a team but you’re individuals as well.

Other boys also commented on their academy friendships, comparing them with their “other mates” from “back at home.” As Alex said:

Well, I don’t compete against my other mates for everything like we do at West-Side...[with] mates at football it’s always competition in everything you do, always wanna win, and everyone wants to be top dog.

When asked what his school friends were like in comparison, Alex said, “I’d say they’re more normal...cos they’re not all like outgoing, like not always trying to outdo each other.”

Against this backdrop of competition and hierarchy boys described their relationships with other boys in the academy in ways that problematized these so-called “friendships”. For example, Jamie (who had been “released” from the academy six months before being interviewed) explains that other boys at West-Side were “just people you go play football with.” Reflecting on some of his friendships during his time as a West-Side academy player (he had “signed” aged eight years old), Jamie noted that:

...you say they’re your mates but actually since I’ve left none of them have bothered to get in touch, and I’m glad cos I’ve just forgot about West-Side. I left and it was gone, out of my head.

The following exchange on the same theme is also from my interview with Jamie:

Jamie: Me and [1] and [2] used to be good mates, they used to come round or maybe we'd speak, but I never spoke to the others much outside of football anyway, you just call 'em your mates cos you know them and you play football with them, not like mates as in you can speak to them or you're really close to them, you just play footy together...it's not real friends, like me and [1] and [2], they could come round mine and we could speak about other people like 'Oh yeah I don't reckon he should be here' and we could speak about stuff like that before, but then I haven't spoke to them once since I've left, and I'm not that bothered so we can't have been that good of mates.

AA: You don't think you were that good mates then?

Jamie: Yeah, well, they come, not last birthday but the one before, they come down, met my mates and we went paintballing and I've been up [1]'s house twice before and, yeah, but then since I've left I haven't been bothered about speaking to no one, I've been like, not even on the phone or BBM [instant messenger on mobile phone], some people I've deleted off Facebook [a social network website] cos I'm not ever gonna be friends with em. Still got [1] and [2], but most people, there's no point.

During my interview with Jamie, I am struck by his comments about not speaking to any of his West-Side 'friends' since leaving the academy, deleting them as 'friends' on social media, and "not being bothered about speaking to no one." Jamie's lack of ability to be intimate or connect emotionally with other boys from West-Side at a time of distress, is itself distressing, particularly for the reason that the boys he is "not bothered" about speaking to, or unable to connect with, are the very boys he describes as having been his primary friends over a number of years at West-Side. Noting how his football friendships (that is, *on the inside* of the academy) were generally restrained and how they have faded away since leaving the club, Jamie said:

You talk about things, nothing secretly, just normal things, like how the match on the weekend, or what you done with your mates, stuff like this, you're just having fun and talking with your mates, nothing like oh come here let me tell you something, like I wouldn't have ever told anyone anything like at West-Side, like about secret stuff, I might've told [1], cos our dads are close as well, but I don't think I never even told him something, cos I've since the Under-9's knew him and I still talk to him normally now, just like oh who you playing this weekend and stuff like this and he asks me are you still on trial at [another professional football academy] and he tries, he keeps in touch with me, like no one from West-Side has tried to keep in touch with me, so I haven't been bothered, but [1] tries, like so I try with him. I've popped up on BBM or Facechat with [2] and he's spoke to me but then like then he's never just popped up randomly, but then, like I said, I'm glad that I've just forgot about it.

While Jamie's comments might be interpreted as representing a kind of "bitterness" at being released from the club and potential career-path he had dedicated so much of his life to, his experience of being released might also be interpreted as a significant life-event that, while emotionally traumatic, has also allowed him the opportunity to reflect on the relationships he maintained during those many years. Being 'let go' has given him a different perspective on his footballing friendships. As Jamie told me:

Since I left, I don't think you realise when you are there, they were just actually people you played football with, they were just people, yeah you might've spoken to, but they were just people you play football with, enjoy yourself.

Equally, of course, not all of the boys interviewed had been released – some (e.g. George and Joel, above) were still registered and maintained high hopes of achieving their dreams of becoming paid-professionals at West-Side. As such, while interview data from boys who had been released might be read (critically) through contrasting lenses of 'bitterness' or 'social awakening,' it might also serve the understanding of boys' academy friendships to read the accounts of registered players through lenses of 'positive experience' or 'social myopia' and 'indoctrination.' Indeed, when read critically, excerpts from interviews with registered players also suggested that 'friendships,' even with 'best mates,' were experienced within an institutional web of competition and hierarchy (also described in CHAPTER SIX) – something that seemed to limit the level of social and emotional trust and intimacy that could be nurtured between individuals, resulting in what I have described below as 'inauthentic' friendships. Of course, many of these boys recognised the limitations in their academy friendships and enjoyed these friendships for what they were – instrumental, business-like, and, for some, fun and "a good laugh."

8.2.2 "BEST MATES" AND "REAL FRIENDS:" TRUST AND (IN)AUTHENTICITY IN ACADEMY FRIENDSHIPS

Several boys at West-Side football academy described their friendships with other boys in the academy as lacking in trust. Will, for example, discussed his friendship with another boy, whom he told me was a "best mate" on the team.

AA: Can you tell me a bit more about your friendship with him?

Will: Well, he makes an atmosphere and I think that's why I get on with him, and people like him cos he livens it up. If everyone's a bit quiet you can rely on him to say something stupid that'll get everyone laughing or he'll be the one that starts something off.

AA: And you've said he's one of the lads you get on best with...

Will: Yeah

AA: What's he like compared to your mates at home and at school?

Will: Um, little bit same, just he's got same sense of humour as me...we get along cos we have the right sense of humour and we take the mick all the time and we give each other banter.

AA: Is he someone you feel like you are close to, like could you trust him with personal stuff, would you say?

Will: No I couldn't, he's not one of them people I could go tell something, he's one of those I could go around with and if I went out with him I'd have a good laugh with him, um, which I couldn't with other people, but I wouldn't say that we was close like that.

Describing his friendship with another teammate at West-Side academy, Will tells me: "He's a mate, but he's one of them people that would tell other people, he's a bit of a loudmouth, doesn't really think about what he says sometimes." Will adds:

I can speak to him, I can have a chat with him, but I wouldn't say too much to him cos I know he couldn't keep a secret, couldn't keep anything from anyone, the trust is not there...I wouldn't say he has got many real friends.

Will's discussion of "real friends" is intriguing. I ask him if he thinks he will stay in touch with any of the other boys over the next few years, as their futures are decided, as some progress to scholarships at West-Side and others are released, and the group becomes more fragmented. Put differently, I want to know if he thinks he has made any *real friends*. "There's a few I'll chat to," he says, "but I probably wouldn't go meet up with them because I'm not really close mates with anyone there, I'm mates but not to the extent that I'd go out and spend time and socialise with 'em, does that make sense?"

Indeed, Will's comments illuminate something that seemed peculiar to many boys' experiences of academy friendships in that 'best friendships' seemed to involve (a) a lack of trust, (b) a questioning of the authenticity of the friendship, and (c) individuals'

cognizance of the social and emotional ‘rules’ of the setting. Further highlighting these themes, Reece suggested that:

You’re closer with your mates from school cos you’re with them longer...I’d rather talk to them about personal stuff than talk to people from football, cos people from football then might use that against you or something like that.

“People use that against you?” I ask. “Yeah,” he adds, “like with the banter, they’d say something about me on the bus, like so and so done or said this, and they can use it against you.” Reece added that his football mates are “...close mates, but you’ve got closer mates who you’ve gone to school with and stuff, who you can be honest with and trust.” Reece also noted that the lower level of trust with academy friends was based on an apprehension that they might “use it against you” if you tell them something personal. Reece said that this had not happened to him personally and that he was simply taking the advice of a friend. As he told me:

A mate told me not to do it, just don’t tell people stuff cos they’ll use it against you, so I just took that advice really and decided it’s not something I’d do.

Several other boys commented on the same feelings, about seeking to “hide things” or “keep stuff away from” other academy players. In this regard, Joel tells me: “Everyone does it, not just me, it’s not just one way.” Continuing, Joel tried to explain this a bit more, using the example of texting or meeting up with a girl from school:

Like, if you’ve been texting a girl, or you’ve been meeting up with a girl, they’ll be like giving you loads of stick...cos of who they are it’d be worse with them than with other people...It goes on for longer and they keep up the jokes longer.”

Regarding the levels of trust between him and his teammates, Joel distinguishes between them and his school mates:

Joel: They’re all big characters, as individuals, all like that, it’s just, but like other people back home aren’t.

AA: Ok, so if I asked you to put things in order, like, how close you are and how much you trust them, where would the West-Side lads be compared to other people in your life?

Joel: They’d be right at the back. Right at the bottom!

AA: What makes you say that?

Joel: Um, well, I dunno if that's how they would be, but I picture them as not being able to tell stuff to.

Kyle tells me that he has a couple of mates in the team, but that he's "obviously" not going to be as close with them as he is with his school mates. Recently let go from West-Side football academy, Kyle provides an interesting reflection on his friendships while "signed." When I ask him if he still talks to any of the others from his team, he says: "I'll still talk to the likes of Jack, people like that, but some players I won't talk to anymore." Following up on this topic, I ask Kyle how he feels about not speaking to many of the other academy players, after spending years on the same team with them at West-Side:

Kyle: It's summat you've gotta do really, if you wanna move on you'll just have to try and find new mates somewhere else, and get on with those on a new team.

AA: Do you feel like they were not genuinely your mates then, cos you're moving on?

Kyle: Obviously some of them you don't feel that close to when you're there, but some of them are.

AA: In what ways are they?

Kyle: Like instead of you goin' up to them all the time they'll come up to you which makes you think that they are...It just helps you, shows you they wanna be your mates instead of you goin' up to them all the time and keep naggin' them.

Toby spoke of his friendships with teammates at West-Side academy as though they were of a different 'fabric' in relation to trust and levels of intimacy. As Toby told me:

I didn't speak to no one at West-Side outside of it, except for [1], but we never used to speak about stuff, like social stuff or anything deep, we just used to speak about football and like...that's all we really talked about.

Comparing his friendships at West-Side to those "back home," Toby adds:

People here [at home] I could tell, but like at West-Side you dunno who you can trust cos you don't actually know them that well. You might know them and think you know them but you don't actually know them as good as you think...They're not really part of my life, they're just there for my football bonding not my social bonding or nothing like that, they just help me play football better and all that.

Adding to this discussion of friendships, Jack describes some of the complexities of his own peer-relationships with teammates at West-Side football academy. Perhaps because of being an 'out of town' player and sharing a different background to some of his teammates, Jack notes that it was not possible to "relate" to all of his teammates, particularly those who grew up in West-Side:

Some, like [1], [2], and [3], you could talk to a lot more cos you could relate to them a bit more, whereas [4], [5], and [6], I still consider them my friends, but it was a bit more difficult to be yourself cos they sort of knew everything about each other and they sort of had their own standards of how they should be, and cos they come from West-Side, they sort of act hard and all that to sort of show everyone where they stand.

Interestingly, on similar grounds, Joel also points out that he did not have much in common with some of the other boys at West-Side:

Part of the thing that you don't have in common with them is like, some of the boys will go to the first-team matches together and they'll do all that and so I suppose you miss out on a bit of the social stuff with them cos they have that in common and that's what they talk about at training and games.

Furthermore, Joel adds:

I'd say there's 'a' group, like there's [1] and [2], and then there's like, there's [1] is 'in' with [3] and stuff like that but I wouldn't say I got on that well with him cos his character I don't really like.

Jack's and Joel's comments are notable in that they hint at an established group *within* this group of academy players, that is, at the centre of their team. Potentially, they also hint at some divisions within the West-Side academy, where boys may have been creating sub-groups based on their geographical history and social class. Admittedly, I do not have enough data to infer in any greater detail the extent to which class factors contributed to 'friendships.' However, there is some evidence of class being a factor in friendships.

For example, in my interview with Jack, he mentioned that sometimes he could find it difficult to 'be himself' while at West-Side. I asked him if he could tell me a bit more

about why he felt this way. The following interview excerpt highlights some of the aforementioned issues regarding out-of-town players and social class:

Jack: Cos you don't know them as well, you see them three times a week that's all, whereas friends you see them every day, and sort of like if I went to the same school as a lot of them you could probably do that cos you'd know them even more, but you sort of cos you don't see them that much cos you only see them at football so that's sort of the main conversation and main thing that brings us together, cos you wouldn't really know about their life outside of that unless you properly got to know them, and cos you're both playing for the same football team you sort of stay on the topic of football a lot more, and banter, cos that's what you know and that's what you can relate about.

AA: So that's different from other teams you've been at?

Jack: Yeah cos obviously, I like banter about football and that, but then the thing is with the teams I've been at before you see them every day, you can sort of talk to them about anything and it's a lot easier and there's a lot less pressure cos they know what you're like and everything.

AA: It's easier with those lads?

Jack: Yeah cos sort of if there's banter at West-Side, cos you only see them five hours a week or whatever, it continues next week cos you can't really see them the next week and you forget about it so they always brought it back up, it could drag for a while, if you saw them at school it'd be a lot different, they could get it out of their system and it'd be over already, but because you only see them two or three times a week it was a long time.

AA: So was there certain stuff that dragged on would you say?

Jack: Yeah! Like [1] calling me posh! It wasn't that bad, I know he was only joking, but he really dragged on about it, especially me and [2], he'd put this really annoying voice on whenever we talked, cos he's got a proper West-Side accent, and I come from around people with [countryside] accents and all that, and I don't sound posher than anyone here at all, and I knew it was a joke, and it was funny sometimes, but he did it for so long, and it was sort of, it got really annoying. I think it did down my confidence a bit.

Continuing, Jack tells me more about which boys he was mates with and why he thought he could relate to them the most:

I was mostly mates with [1], [2], and [3] [who all live some distance from West-Side], so there was sort of a group who didn't come from near anyone else, sort of made their own group, we don't come from places where there's other people on the team, we were from different schools to everyone else, the only people in our schools who were at West-Side. It sort of felt like I could relate to them a bit more cos they were in same situation as me.

Touching again on the theme of social class, several of the boys at West-Side pointed out that sometimes their use of language would be highlighted and disciplined by their teammates. This is discussed with Will, in the interview extract below:

Will: Now and again at West-Side I would say something differently to what I would do around my other mates:"

AA: Can you give any examples of that?

Will: Um, like around my mates we're pretty chilled out and then with some of the football mates they're quite chavvy, quite gangster, like swing out some weird words and stuff like that and now and again it just gets into you and saying "sound" all the time and you just come back goin "Oh that was sound" and it's like wow I don't usually say that but, you just, no one thinks anything cos they [city boys] say it so they're just like oh fair enough so they don't notice it and I just get on with it.

AA: You just get on with it?

Will: Well, I'll notice it sometimes, and afterwards think hmm I don't normally say that

AA: You just catch yourself...

Will: Yeah...oh, and [1] will wind me up cos he's one of them kids that knows I don't say stuff like that, like, "*Sound?* What you chatting about *sound?*" and he'll start winding me up then about it like "Oh you're not gangster and this and you're not chavvy" and I'm like "Ah it just slipped out alright, it 'appens," and you just get on with it. We have a bit of a laugh about it. It's pretty chilled out.

According to Will, academy players who also went to the same school were closer than those who went to different schools. For Will, the boys on the team who were from West-Side were an important group to "get along with" for him to feel like he was part of the team. As Will told me:

They're the loudest, and well, they're all from the same school. But they're all close mates and that group are like, have been there most of the longest out of all them, they've been there from the start basically, they've got to know people, they've got their own little group of friends which they've known from school, and when you, kind of get along with them and, when you get along with one of them you get along with all of 'em really so that's why, they're easy to chat to and they're, most people chat to them.

Adding currency to the idea that “friendships” among this group of boys were predominantly consolidated around previous relationships, Jack told me that:

There was always a lot of banter, but, well, it was a bit more difficult for people like me and [1], cos there were like a group of boys who went to the same school who were from the same place who knew each other, and then there was me, [1], and [2].

Furthermore, Toby noted that, “I don’t think people were friends outside of [West-Side], apart from [1], [2], and those lot [meaning boys who actually lived in West-Side].”

8.3 NEGOTIATING FRIENDSHIPS ON THE “OUTSIDE”

It was also apparent from my data that while the boys were negotiating the peculiarities of their academy friendships ‘on the inside’ of West-Side academy they were also sustaining and dealing with changes in existing friendships that had been formed ‘on the outside’ of the academy. The data presented here suggested that their ‘footballing lives’ often left them feeling alienated or disconnected from their ‘old friends,’ as though they were making a choice between two identities. What was particularly striking was how the boys often rationalised their compromised friendships outside of the academy with discourse that reflected the belief that they were making the necessary “sacrifices” for a career as a professional footballer. In short, the data presented here suggests that boys believed the football academy offered them more, in terms of procurable life satisfactions, than the ‘outside world.’ Goffman (1961) has described this kind of alignment with the institutional world (i.e. when the institution is perceived to offer more satisfactions to the individual) as “colonization.” In this sense, boys’ “Experience of the outside world is used as a point of reference to demonstrate the desirability of life on the inside” (Goffman, 1961, p.62): they believe that a commitment to the academy at the potential expense of other social experiences over a number of years is absolutely worthwhile.

8.3.1 DOING SOMETHING WORTHWHILE: SACRIFICING FRIENDSHIPS FOR “A CAREER”

You sometimes have to sacrifice your friendships with some people, well not your friendship but friend[sentence trails off]...like if I wasn’t at West-Side, then I’d be out with my mates I’d be so much closer to people I hang around with, but you can’t go out with them as much...like, you would be training and they’d be going out with other people so like friendship could be...I dunno if they were true friends it wouldn’t be that bad but like with some people if they don’t get to see you they

go off you. But if you're really that important to them your friends and that wouldn't be that bothered, if they knew your football meant everything they wouldn't be that bothered, but then some people worry about that, about losing friends.

(Toby, West-Side Academy Player)

As Toby illustrates, for some boys there was a conflicted sense of commitment to 'career' versus 'friends.' The commitment to being an academy footballer (and 'aspiring professional') meant that social engagements were often considered carefully, with social activities requiring a sort of 'risk assessment.' The weekend was often mentioned as the time for social activities, when boys were invited to parties and other gatherings. However, the weekend was also the most physically demanding time of the week in relation to performance in the context of the academy.

Toby added that back home his friendship groups have fluctuated somewhat as a result of coming under pressure from some "friends" to drink, smoke, and "wander around the streets" doing "stupid things." "Them things I said no," he said, "I don't wanna do stuff like that. That stuff could jeopardise my career, I wanna do something worthwhile, goin to football." Describing a typical instance of the 'pressure to participate' that he felt when socialising with his friends at home, outside of the academy, Joel noted that:

Your friends go out late on Friday or Saturday and you can't or you have to come in early cos you got a match the next day, or they all go into town but you can't cos you got football.

Highlighting the 'risk assessments' made in relation to socialising with outside friends, Connor noted that:

...it was about 4 or 5 o'clock, party started about half 7 or 8, and it was about 20-minutes, and I had to catch a bus...so if I went to the party and something happened like the bus was late home or something like that or I just couldn't catch a bus back in time, I'd regret that in the morning when I played football and I'd know that I wouldn't play as good as I could have and that I could've ruined an opportunity of being what I wanna be.

It was also interesting to hear how the boys rationalised their experiences of 'missing out' in relation to interactions with their 'outside' friends. Declining offers and putting up with the 'pressure' from outside friends was typically considered part of the 'deal' when playing for a professional football club. For example, Will believed that his aspiration to be a professional footballer meant that 'missing out,' while difficult, had been something "...you just learn really, and you just gotta get on with it...I'd rather be

playing football anyway, just because, I know that I could make a career out of it.” Similarly, Joel commented:

I wouldn't say it annoys me cos I can't be arsed anyway! I don't think I'm missing out, it's just not something I've done, cos I'm doing stuff that is beneficial, you know, if I'm gonna try at football, don't wanna cut corners, you know.

Joel added that after “saying no” a few times, his outside friends have come to understand his commitment to being a professional footballer: “It's just like ‘nah, I got football’...they know you're at West-Side so it makes them pressure you less, say like they don't wanna put your future at risk.” Alternatively, Connor suggested that while “everyone plays football” in his local area some of his friends have not yet grasped the seriousness of his commitment to West-Side academy. “They're like, it's all the same...you can still come to the party,” he says. “[They] don't understand that it's a bit more serious and that I could actually get a career out of it.” Will, Joel, and Connor all conceptualise football as “serious” work, a demanding, consuming, yet enviable, “opportunity” to “make a career.” In this vein, Toby noted that:

You think about it all and it blocks up your head...Your mates [at home] don't realise how hard you gotta work there [at West-Side academy]....They don't know what you gotta do and how hard it can be, the work you gotta put in when you're not there and in your own time...They don't see all that.

For some boys at West-Side, therefore, the life of being an academy player appeared to involve feelings of distance and alienation (e.g. “They don't realise,” “They don't know,” “They don't see”) from not just other boys ‘inside’ the academy, but also boys ‘outside’ the academy, that is, other boys at school or in their local area friendship groups. On coping with some of the stress he felt, Toby mentioned he would “take a football and walk around the streets, to clear my head, like just around here, in a circle.” Like Toby, Connor also told me that any issue or problems he was having would generally not be shared with his mates back home. As he told me: “It's not something I do, I just keep quiet, keep it all in, and deal with it myself.” Imbued with masculinity, and perhaps highlighting the limited emotionally intimate and ‘buffering’ relationships he maintained with others, Connor adds:

Talking to people about all your problems is a sign of weakness I suppose, you don't wanna see anyone when you're sad, so when things don't go right I normally run it off, do something to blow off steam, literally run it off.

In a similar vein, data from my interview with Henry are revealing of how he coped with stressful times while an academy player at West-Side. As Henry noted: "With football, when I'm not liking it, my dad can tell but I don't like speaking to 'im, I'd rather keep it on myself." Interestingly, one place where Henry did find adequate and emotionally-enriching support was from his girlfriend: "I used to speak to her about it all," Henry told me. "Cos I'd find it more easy to talk to her about it, like, and she wouldn't understand but she'd be like 'well why don't you try this' and that helped." Sometimes, Henry says, he would talk to his mates, too, although the support they offered seemed to offer him less satisfaction or nourishment:

I speak to my mates about it as well, like I'd be like 'I dunno what to do, I don't like it there but I wanna be a footballer,' and they'd be trying to help me, they'd do their best to help me, they don't really know but they tried their best. I find it so much easier to talk to my mates or my girlfriend than talk to my dad. Cos I dunno why, it's just the way I rather do it, than 'im goin' 'what's wrong what's wrong,' and me 'nothing,' I'd just go to bed, or lie in the bath, I dunno, it's hard to explain.

It was clear that Henry really struggled to talk to his dad about any of the problems he was having at West-Side, despite wanting to open up more, and despite saying that he could trust his dad. Something was holding Henry back, as the following two interview excerpts show:

When I weren't enjoying it, he knew. But I was like 'no dad, I'm fine.' I'd just be thinking 'oh why do I have to go and he knew I didn't wanna be there but then I'd never never [sic] tell him I don't wanna be there because I feel like he'd say 'why?' And then I actually wouldn't know why, I could tell someone else why I don't like it, but then speaking to him I couldn't.

I can trust my dad, I know I can. I can tell him and he won't say nothing to no one and he'll be like 'oh yeah' and try and help me, but then...I don't wanna speak to him about it...I dunno, I know he won't judge me, or he won't like have a go at me, but it'll be on his mind I know that, like when I weren't enjoying football at [West-Side] it was on his mind day and night, even mum was saying 'tell dad, tell dad what you wanna,' cos he weren't sleeping, he wants the best for me, and I know that and I try my best, and mum's always saying like he wakes up and he just lies there thinking about me and my mum knows what he's thinking about, and he tells me 'c'mon tell me, I stay up all night just wondering what are you thinking' but then I can't, I dunno...

Henry's experiences at West-Side clearly created conflict and tension in his family and left him feeling isolated and alienated, particularly from his dad. The expectations of being an academy player at West-Side evidently weighed heavily on Henry's shoulders. However, highlighting the extent to which boys may be institutionalised in and colonized by academy life, leaving West-Side did not seem to be an option for Henry, and even when he was not enjoying his football he could not communicate this to his dad ("I feel like he'd say why? And then I actually wouldn't know why"). Boys' experiences of expectations felt from people "outside" the academy are something I explore more in the final section of this chapter.

8.3.2 BEING "THE BOY": MANAGING IDENTITY AND ASSOCIATED EXPECTATIONS

As well as inhibiting the ways in which boys felt able to participate in their outside friendships on a more pragmatic level, 'belonging' to the academy also appeared to be a form of symbolic capital in the outside friendship market. As Goffman writes (1961, p.70), "entrance means for the recruit that he has taken on what might be called a proactive status...his social position on the outside will never be quite what it was prior to entrance." Against a cultural backdrop in which football is esteemed (particularly among working-class youth) boys' proactive 'academy-status' had the potential to develop, enhance, and maintain social capital outside of the academy, transforming his status among peers and marking a radical change in his 'moral career' (c.f. Goffman, 1961), that is, the changes in his own and others' conception of his self. Reflecting on when he was first trying out for the West-Side academy team as an eight-year old, Toby noted that:

My mate he was always like 'Oh my mate plays for West-Side, let him play for you' and all this...So I'm like number one: I don't play for them I'm just on trial, and yeah it's like pressure, and my mate's like he plays for West-Side, and I'm like, it could be a compliment but then it couldn't as well cos then...well, they could be like 'How does *he* play for West-Side?'

Having "signed" for West-Side at 8-years old, being an academy player became central to Toby's identity and his moral career, being "good" at football was something that featured in the development of a number of his everyday friendships. "Some people

think you're all cocky," he tells me, "I've had that, cos with people I don't know that well." Toby explained:

...people that don't know me...they probably wouldn't talk to me as much, cos I meet friends and they're like 'Oh do you wanna play for my team,' like my mate Monday night cos I'm mates with some kid I know him from down [local sports club] and he was down there and I played with him once and his mate was down there and was like 'Oh you were alright tonight,' and maybe if I weren't that good he didn't make good friends with other people cos he was just like 'Oh' and he was good friends with me, added me on BBM [instant messenger] and he was like 'Oh play for my team some other time,' and I talked to him, maybe like that, and you see him and then it's like 'You alright mate,' and you talk about stuff, and they invite you to do stuff with 'em.

Jack, who joined the academy much later than most, aged 13, noted a similar experience of a change in his moral career, and finding that social capital was attached to his academy status.

Out of my friends I was the only one at a professional club at my school, and everyone was like 'Oh he plays for West-Side, for a professional club.' I became *that* person, 'The Boy,' which was quite good, and I sort of became known as the person that played for West-Side for quite a while.

Kyle also commented that "They [outside friends] wanna push you, and they say 'Oh when you get to be a pro, remember me' and stuff like this." Such comments highlight the "celebrity" status that academy boys can experience from a young age and, as Kyle noted in the excerpt below, can "sort of boost" you:

Kyle: They [boys at school] don't say nothing bad about it, some of the older kids come over and say 'I heard you're a really good footballer' and stuff like this and coming from someone older than you it's just good straight away, even if you don't know em. And like, what I've had is when the people [in the year] above have needed people for [school] football [matches], they've been like straight away 'ask Kyle,' and that just makes you feel good. Just being asked to play for the year above.

AA: Ah ok, yeah, must feel good...

Kyle: Yeah, knowing that they think I'm good as well...it's just a weird thing, if they think you're good as well then it sort of boosts your confidence back up to know that you're good yourself if you know what I mean, like you don't wanna have arrogance but a little bit of confidence, it gives you confidence.

As Jack commented below, there was also potential for tensions to emerge in social exchanges with outside friendship. While proud of their "academy status" on a personal

level, some of the boys also maintained some reservations when their academy status was 'revealed.'

AA: So your friends started to see you differently?

Jack: Well, yeah sort of...like, say we were playing football at school and I'd cock up then they'd be like 'Oh I thought you played for West-Side?!' and it would get annoying sometimes, but then you'd do something really good and they wouldn't say a thing and you knew they'd be thinking 'That's why he plays for West-Side' and that felt good to know they were thinking that.

AA: How did all that kind of thing make you feel?

Jack: I knew it was a joke and there was a load of mates who would say it, and I'd just be like 'Oh well you get there then,' and 'Alright do you play for a club then?' but then like later on if I did something good they'd be like 'OK I can see why you play there.'

AA: So, were there ever times when you felt people's comments about you playing for West-Side weren't good?

Jack: Erm, the older year, at school, they sort of if it was a kick around, like I get on with them but there's one or two, really arrogant sort of thing, like they're the best at everything, and they'd always take it, like they'd be sliding in on me at school, like you don't really need to do that, and getting really arrogant.

Similarly, as Will suggested, in a school where "football was big," having academy status could often be added pressure to perform on the playground. Commenting on an "academy teammate" who also attended his school (who had been going through a difficult time), Will said:

He could be quite aggressive, he was like, you could be having a conversation or be playing a game, keepin' the ball up, a bit of 'two touch' in school, and he could get really irritated cos he's really competitive and he doesn't like to lose cos of that place of being at a pro club and playing for West-Side he don't wanna be under-done [sic]...He likes people to think that he's the best at what he does, and he's quite conscious about what people think about him.

According to Will, his teammate was experiencing significant pressure from his peers at this time:

I think the pressure was getting to him, that people didn't think, cos around school football was big as well, cos everyone was whispering behind his back going should he be at a pro club and stuff like this...so it's not easy.

Will's suggestion that it was important for his friend, as a West-Side academy player, to continually show his school-mates that he was a better footballer than them, and therefore deserved his place at a professional club, was indicative of the never-ending cycle of assessment that boys at West-Side experienced, as highlighted previously in CHAPTER SIX. In this sense, it seemed that some academy boys experienced a perpetual need to demonstrate their superiority; not only having their performance assessed by coaches whilst on "official" academy duty but also having to prove themselves day-in-day-out among peers (even when "off-duty"). In a way, therefore, being an academy player seemed to significantly 'grow' an individual's 'front-stage' (c.f. Goffman, 1959) in that they felt a greater pressure to 'perform' across a broader set of social establishments.

8.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter explores two ideas or concepts: friendship and competition. In doing so, it builds on CHAPTER SIX in particular, in which I outlined the competitive social organisation of West-Side academy and some of the ways that competition was embedded in the social fabric of everyday life at West-Side. With regards to friendship, some developmental literature in the context of sport (e.g., Carr, 2009, 2012a, 2012b; Carr and Fitzpatrick, 2011) highlights the importance (for well-being) of a deep sense of emotional connectedness to friends, security (where friends are a source of safety and emotional comfort during times of threat or emotional need), a platform for the expression of vulnerability, authenticity, and care. In short, intimate, caring and secure friendships may offer children and young people a 'buffer' in times of psychosocial distress. Other research has identified that competition (in sport) may be a significant impediment to the formation of secure friendships and peer relationships (e.g. Ommundsen, 2005; Patrick et al., 1999; Zarbatany et al., 2000). The data presented in this chapter shed further light on the experiences of adolescent boys in competitive sport, and highlights the peculiarities of 'friendships' in this setting.

Summarising the data presented above, this chapter has critically explored the nature of boys' peer relationships and friendships within the context of a professional football academy. This again highlights the need to interrogate how a contemporary institution, that has become a part of the life-world for many boys, might fundamentally alter how

'friendship' is lived and experienced for such young people and how it might constrict the expression of what Anderson (2009) has called emotional proximity. My data provided a number of interesting avenues for discussion, perhaps most importantly highlighting how competition and hierarchies were interwoven in the fabric of life at West-Side football academy (and perhaps into the broader life-world and 'self' of boys), leading to an apprehension about expressing vulnerability and to limitations on the extent to which boys could develop 'deep' friendships full of trust and emotional intimacy.

Borrowing from the perspective of Goffman (1961, p.280), who highlighted how it is only "against something" that identities are constructed, the boys at West-Side might be viewed as constructing their identities and friendships against the neoliberal rationality of pervasive competition that "resides in the arrangements prevailing" at West-Side academy. In this sense, borrowing again from Goffman (1961), it is no wonder that a prevailing (institutional) competitiveness among boys at West-Side comes to colonize and constitute their social relationships, and dismantles any possibility of forming intimate, caring, and lasting friendships with others in this setting. The structure and culture of West-Side academy means that boys' friendships and peer relationship are disciplined, shaped, and nudged into a particular organisation. Joel's declaration captured in this thesis (p.189) that he tries to be mates with other boys at West-Side, "but its business," is a clear indication that West-Side as an institution obliges boys in this setting "to be of a given character" (Goffman, 1961, p.165) and to engage in "embracement": that is, to embrace "the practice of reserving something of oneself from the clutch of an institution."

By embedding competition into the relationships of boys such at this group at West-Side academy, therefore, the professional football industry encourages them to employ methods "to keep some distance, some elbow room" between themselves and others (c.f. Goffman, 1961, p.279). Speaking from my own data, therefore, despite their claims to friendship and being mates, there is strong evidence to suggest that the competition embedded into boys' friendships and peer relationships as a consequence of the neoliberal market-driven objectives of the football club ultimately leads to boys'

disconnection from each other. Put simply, the data presented here suggests that this sporting space was not one in which close friendships were fostered.

Building on this chapter, and my discussion of Goffman's (1961) concept of disconnection and Anderson's (2009) idea of emotional proximity in male friendships, the next chapter in this thesis focuses on another traditionally central facet of masculinity: homophobia. In line with others who have examined constructions of masculinities among young men in sport (e.g. Anderson, 2009; Magrath et al., 2013), I explore attitudes toward homosexuality among boys at West-Side academy. Given that boys' experience at West-side was manifested in a suppressed capability to engage in close, trusting, and emotionally intimate friendships, I sought to examine further the role of masculinities in how boys 'approached each other.' According to Anderson (2009), increased emotional-proximity among young men may be an expression of *inclusive masculinities*: a form of masculinity constructed in line with decreased cultural homophobia.

Anderson's reasoning is that decreased homophobia leads men to be less fearful of being thought homosexual (less homohysterical), and this allows them to engage in ways of 'being' that would have previously (in times of high homophobia) led to homosexual-suspicion and incitement of homophobia from peers. Working backwards from this theorising, therefore, a lack of emotional-proximity (as outlined in the data presented above) might be read as indicating a lack of inclusive masculinities in this setting. Accordingly, in order to examine for inclusive masculinities at West-Side academy, CHAPTER NINE focuses on boy's attitudes to homosexuality, their use of homosexually-themed language, and the prospect that - one day - they might occupy the professional levels of football with an openly gay teammate.

CHAPTER 9: “THEY GET A BIT OF STICK...I JUST STAY OUT OF IT:” (ESPOUSED) INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY, AND COMPLICITY, AMONG BOYS AT WEST-SIDE ACADEMY

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, some research exploring competitive team sports (c.f. Anderson, 2009; Magrath, Roberts, and Anderson, 2013; McCormack, 2011) has articulated a ‘changing social landscape’ with regard to young adult males’ tolerance and acceptance of homosexuality, in contrast to previous theorising on gender and the dominance of more orthodox masculinities (c.f. Connell, 1995). In contrast to Connell’s (1995) Hegemonic Masculinity, which theorises that *some* men maintain hegemony (dominance) over other men (internal hegemony), and *all* men maintain hegemony over women (external hegemony) therefore sustaining a patriarchal society, Anderson (2009) has theorised Inclusive Masculinity to describe a brand of masculinity but the relations between men, in which some forms of masculinity are dominant, but they do dominate others. At the heart of inclusive masculinities, is the idea that there has been a social trend among men toward an acceptance of homosexuality and gay people (internal inclusivity), and a spirit of egalitarianism toward women (external inclusivity). Important in the context of the findings presented in this chapter, for example, Magrath et al. (2013) suggest such an (intellectualised) change in masculinities among 16-18 year (male) academy footballers, pointing to the ‘inclusivity’ (c.f. Anderson, 2009) of these young men in the particular social context of professional football.

This chapter explores similar themes, driven by a desire to find out more about the (internal) inclusivity of young male team-sport athletes. Contextualised through the contemporary ‘issue’ of gay footballers, the data presented below explores the (espoused) attitudes toward homosexuality and gay athletes among the boys at West-Side academy. Importantly, this chapter does *not* explore (external) inclusivity, that is, the relations between men and women, boys and girls: an important distinction which I pick up on later in this chapter. The analysis in this chapter, informed by both Connell’s (1995) Hegemonic Masculinity, Anderson’s (2009) Inclusive Masculinities, and

Demetriou's (2001) and Bridges (2014) work on *hybrid masculinities*, is organised into two parts: (i) boys' general attitudes toward homosexuality, and (ii) boys' thoughts and feelings about the 'issue' of gay footballers.

9.2 ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUALITY

9.2.1 ESPOUSED INCLUSIVITY: TALKING ABOUT GAY PEERS, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY

"I think its fine," says Connor, in an interview. "You should be with who you wanna be with...people are the way they are so let them be that way." Connor continues, "People should feel comfortable in themselves, not hiding something from themselves or from someone else." When I interviewed Connor at his family's home in the suburbs of West-Side, it had been just over a year since I had coached him at West-Side's academy. Connor tells me that he has continued to enjoy his football at West-Side and is hopeful of attaining a place on the scholarship programme for 16-18 year olds. At the end of our interview, Connor mentions that he is about to meet up with a friend; a slightly older boy (16) who was one of the scholarship players at West-Side. Before leaving, I asked Connor how he thought his friend would respond to my questions about homosexuality and gay footballers, and what his friend's opinion would be. "I'm not sure," says Connor. "I don't think he would agree with what I believe. I think he'd be against it [gay footballers]." He adds:

At football it can be different, it's tough. But that's just the way I've been brought up. It's not really an issue if someone is gay. I just think everyone deserves that respect.

Several other boys, teammates of Connor at West-Side academy, express a similar attitude. Jack, for example, tells me, "Homosexuality isn't nothing to be ashamed of." Another boy, Reece, adds: "I don't have a problem with it." Furthermore, Reece says he has thought a lot about things like gay marriage and where he stands on the issue, and seems at ease talking about the gay people he knows. Moreover, this tone of acceptance is also reflected by George.

When I meet George at his home, his dad suggests the local family-friendly 'inn' as a good place for our interview. As George and I walked down the road toward the inn, we began to talk about football: I talked about the new club I was coaching at, and

George told me a bit about his own situation at West-Side and his hopes of getting onto the scholarship programme – he would be told in a matter of months if he had made it. At the inn, we sat outside in the sunshine on a wooden bench with a couple of soft drinks, I set down my audio-recorder on the table between us, and we started the interview. I explained to George some of the broad themes of my research, including that one of the things I wanted to talk to him about were his social-relationships and friendships with gay people; that is, if he has had any previously, if he has any currently, and what he thinks about them being gay. George tells me:

Yeah, I know some gay people. And it don't bother me...My cousin is bisexual and I got two people in my tutor group who are gay. And I got like one of my best mates his cousin is gay and I know him quite well...It don't affect what I think of them at all, I just think of them as normal people. I knew them before I found out, well one of them I knew, who's a little older than me, he came out quite a while ago, but it doesn't make a difference with him at all being gay.

George's reference to bisexuality provides an interesting point of departure in this research; in that, while bisexuality was not the focus of any particular question (I framed my questions more generally around attitudes toward "gay people"), it was interesting to note that mentions of bisexuality tended to be something that sometimes emerged as part of my conversations with these boys. Highlighting this further, several other boys recognised the bisexuality of others while we were discussing gay peers, friends, and relatives. For example, Will told me: "In our school we got two gay people, a lesbian and I think we got a bisexual as well." In addition, Kyle notes: "Two came out in Year-7 – one boy and one bisexual girl. And another came out a few years after." He adds, "It was a bit of a shock, cos we were only about 12 years old."

As these boys note, school appeared to be a familiar location for meeting (or, at least, knowing about) lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. As Jamie told me: "There's a few people in my friend's school that are gay, and one of my brother's friend's at uni is one of his closest friends, and is gay." I asked Jamie, who told me he is accepting of his gay peers, about what has shaped his attitudes toward gay people. He notes that his parents have been a big influence on him in this regard, and that he has learned from their accepting attitude:

They've not been "Oh he's different stay away from him" and all that, they've just been like "he's the same as you, he's a normal person, he still acts the same, you can still talk the same," and that it basically don't matter.

Further demonstrating that some boys have not just "heard about" LGB people in their social networks, but have also engaged with some of their LGB peers, Alex told me a number of details about the gay people he knows personally. Alex told me how old his gay peers were, how old they were when they came out, how one of the boys in his wider friendship group is gay, and how they sometimes hang out at friend's houses as part of a bigger social group, and will sometimes socialise at parties together. Alex notes: "We all get on and we just get on with it." Regarding his gay peers, Alex also commented that he has "grown up with it all around him," and so it feels "normal." The fact that some of his peers are gay is something that he says he has adapted to. "They're normal to me," he told me. Still, Alex tells me, because he has not talked about "this stuff" much with others, he says that "It can be hard to find the right words sometimes, cos I don't wanna offend people."

In a similar vein, Jamie noted: "We've grown up with it [gay peers]." In my interview with Jamie, I reflected with him on my (lack of) early experiences sharing social spaces with LGB peers, and the fact that I did not meet any openly gay people, or really get to know any gay people, until beginning an undergraduate course at university in my early twenties. Jamie makes a playful jibe at what he calls my "old age." He then told me: "We're used to it all now – a lot has changed since you were our age."

Continuing in our interview, Jamie tells me the first gay person he met was someone who played cricket at the same local cricket club, in the suburbs of West-Side. "There's a gay guy - he plays in the adult side - but everyone treats him the same and that." He notes, "It's not like professional or anything, but the players basically seem to be comfortable with it and treat him exactly the same." Jamie also told me: "I actually know his cousin." He explains:

That's the adults team he plays for but his cousin is my age, and I knew them both but didn't know it was his cousin but then I found out. I didn't even realise he was gay for a while. It was only his cousin ended up telling me after we met and all that...he still acts the same, behaves the same, plays the same game.

Reflecting on the (homo)sexuality of this male acquaintance, Jamie concludes, “It shouldn’t be something used against him.”

Seemingly, through various friend and family relationships and acquaintances, several of these West-Side academy players have established an awareness of the presence of LGB persons in different aspects of their lives. Notably, I found evidence to suggest that this social awareness also had the potential to shape some boys’ views on homosexuality. As Reece noted of a family acquaintance who is gay:

When you think of a gay person, you think the extreme, all soft and that. And you kind of realise, you know, they’re not always like that, and I suppose that’s what everyone thought, the stereotype, but he’s quite masculine as well I suppose.

Reece’s comments are suggestive of a lingering cultural association between homosexuality and femininity. Reece’s comments above, discussing his thoughts about a gay peer coming out at his school, also highlight the potential complexity of individual perspectives on gender and sexuality among some youth today. For example, when Reece told me that “When you think of a gay person...you think the extreme, all soft and that,” he also recognised this world-view as a kind of “stereotype,” and at the same time suggested that his previously held beliefs are being recalibrated to incorporate a more diverse perspective of how boys and men can “do” gender; that is, into a more complex understanding of human sexuality and gender.

Reflecting on the data presented above, it appears that an increasing cultural awareness and acceptance of gay people in everyday life in England has begun, somewhat, to penetrate the (sub)culture of the professional football academy. Admittedly, since I did not gather concrete data on social class, I am not able to provide definite data on whether boys’ experiences, encounters, and attitudes were linked to social class. The limited data I do have (for example, from visiting several family homes) suggests that the boys I interviewed can be located on the class spectrum as lower middle-class and upper working-class. This is perhaps a crude assessment of social class, and I am cognizant that the concept of social class is far more complex and dynamic than I have given credence to in this research. Still, my data provides some evidence for inclusivity among the youth levels of the professional football industry. However, I also found that, when it came to challenging gender-norms and

negativity toward gay people, boys' inclusivity and acceptance of gay people was interwoven with a hint of what Connell (1987, 1995) has described as 'complicity', and this raises some questions about what being *inclusive* means according to Anderson's (2009) inclusive masculinities framework.

9.2.2 "I JUST STAY OUT OF IT:" COMPLICIT-INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES

In addition to intellectualised statements of inclusivity, another theme to emerge through interviews was how several boys, who suggested they were accepting and inclusive of gay peers (as described in the previous section), talked about disagreeing with but also sometimes "going along" with some of the thoughts and actions of less-inclusive peers. Jamie, for example, noted: "I still know a lot of people around who still don't think it's normal and it shouldn't happen and all that." Talking about this more, Jamie told me about being in class at school one day, when the topic of (homo)sexuality came up between his classmates:

A load of people were just in class saying 'Oh it's not normal and it shouldn't be like that,' and saying a male and female can produce a baby, and that's how it should be.

Jamie added that he personally disagreed with the statements made in class that day.

For me, it's like, if they love them, they love them. You can't help it can you, it's the way you feel, but a lot of people aren't as OK with it. It shouldn't be like that, a lot of people...you should just have to deal with it, if you got a problem with it just keep it to yourself.

However, while feeling that the thoughts espoused by his peers in class that day were problematic, Jamie also told me that he did not speak up and challenge those around him. As Jamie noted: "I dunno, it's difficult to argue sometimes, cos I don't know what to say."

Several other boys suggested similar feelings when hanging around friends who have been talking about gay peers. Connor, for example, said that he knows two openly gay students at his school. Connor noted that: "They get a bit of stick, not from me but they do get it. I just stay out of it." When I asked him what he means by this, he adds: "Like, people say stuff, jokes behind their back." Connor says he did not contest these jokes, but rather went along with them. Sitting and talking in his house, he noted: "I feel bad

sometimes, like what I'd want to do sitting here now, and say if it happened earlier in the day I'd think oh why didn't I say something."

According to Magrath et al (2013), the 16-18 year old academy players in their study said that they would physically assault anybody who was homophobically bullying a gay player. Interestingly, they also found that these same academy players would do this even if they did not personally like the gay player: they perceived homophobic bullying to be *wrong* and something that would not be tolerated by their teammates. Thus, Connor's admission of 'staying out of it' when some openly gay students at his school got 'a bit of stick' from his schoolmates, read in light of Magrath et al.'s (2013) findings that 16-18 year old academy players challenge homophobic bullying may suggest that something changes in youth masculinities between 14 years old and 18 years old, wherein boys begin to make a change a stand up for gay men (or, at least, hypothesise that they would, since Magrath et al.' questions about gay teammate, like mine, are based on hypothetical situations rather than settings in which a gay teammate is out). Alternatively, there may be something about the culture of the club that Magrath et al (2013) studied, and the ways that coaches represented their own beliefs and values about masculinities in day-to-day aspects of their work.

In addition to Connor's comments, Alex, contradicting some of his earlier claims about inclusivity among his friends and gay peers from his school, told me, "That gay lad I told you about is in the group, but he's not." Explaining further, Alex noted:

Well I'm not best friends with him but he'd be at parties and stuff. It was a shock to hear about them [peers in school coming out as gay], and some people were going and taking the mick, and you know I went along a little bit, but I never, I wasn't doing it but I suppose I wasn't stopping it.

Alex's statements of inclusivity on one hand and his acknowledgement of homo-negative behaviour from his peers on the other hand, are interwoven with a lack of agency to speak up on behalf and challenge his friends from "taking the mick" out of his gay peers. It was not clear from my data whether this meant that his friends were engaged in this behaviour in the presence of gay peers or "behind their back" (as Connor described earlier), yet Alex told me that, while going "along a little bit," he felt like he was "in the middle...not sure what to say or do."

Importantly, despite expressing support for their gay peers, several boys, for example Jamie, Connor and Alex, suggested that they “went along” with or “kept quiet” when schoolmates demonstrated homonegativity. Highlighting the complexity of what it means to be “inclusive” or “complicit,” each of the three boys represented above (boys who had previously discussed their amicable social relationships with gay people), while not speaking up to challenge negative “jokes” about gay peers, did express empathy and some feelings of guilt at not speaking up. Theoretically speaking, the (gender-internal) inclusivity of these boys, with regard to their accepting attitudes toward homosexuality and gay people²⁸ (c.f. Anderson, 2009), is consumed and folds into a complicit form of masculinity as described by Connell (1995) when confronted with more orthodox forms, meaning that boys’ (espoused) inclusive values faded into the background during social encounters in their everyday lives. In these encounters, therefore, homo-negative ways of thinking (I hesitate to use the term homophobia, since I did not witness the incidents boys described), remained uncontested.

Accordingly, there was some evidence to suggest that some boys felt that the act of demonstrating their inclusivity, that is, “stepping in” (i.e. calling out and contesting homo-negative or homophobic language and behaviour) had the potential to alienate them from their friendship groups. To be clear, none of these boys told me of any moment where they contested homo-negative comments made by peers. As such, they had no evidence that they would *actually* be targeted, alienated, or marginalised by these same people. Demonstrating the importance of not marginalising oneself among peers, and thus highlighting how espoused inclusivity was sometimes suppressed in everyday experiences, Connor told me:

The way I see it, taking the mick out of a gay person would just be like, it’s not on...but in school you’re just trying to be the big man, show off in front of people, and make people laugh.

If Connor’s claims to inclusivity are held to be true, Connor’s statement suggests, perhaps, that ‘stepping in’ and making public one’s own inclusivity and acceptance was

²⁸ I have not explored ‘external’ inclusivity, since I have not explored their attitudes to women, and how their behaviours affect women. This is why I talk of internal inclusivity in the context of discussing inclusive masculinities at West-Side.

out-of-sync with the prevailing cultural masculinity of his school-based friendship group, i.e. of 'being the big man,' 'showing off' and 'having a laugh.' In this instance, all of these cultural markers outweighed Connor's agency to uphold his own (espoused) personal values of inclusivity. Perhaps this is bordering on an oversimplification. Connor could well be described as inclusive. Yet, his relationship with inclusivity and masculinities more broadly is anything but simple. Given Magrath et al.'s (2013) findings, it may be that Connor's inclusivity flourishes in the coming years and he develops the agency which will allow him to challenge the homo-negativity of his peers. In summary to this section, while many individual boys did espouse inclusivity when it came to accepting gay peers, it appeared that (at this moment in time) expressing this among 'friends' and 'mates' was a more complex and challenging experience.

9.2.3 "YEAH, COS YOU'RE GAY:" EXPLORING BOYS' USE OF HOMOSEXUALLY-THEMED LANGUAGE

At West-Side's training centre, the under-14 boys are in a classroom, taking part in some 'session planning'. This amounts to the boys working in small groups of two or three; their task being to sketch out on a piece of paper a 'session plan' (essentially a lesson plan) of a training session that could be used to develop their skills on a topic given to them by their coach. They will then be focusing on this topic in their training sessions over the next few weeks. One boy, Henry, is finishing up his session plan. Henry is writing on a piece of paper, when another boy, Joel, looks over and says (quite loudly so the whole classroom can hear) that Henry has got neat handwriting: "all of your books at school must be really neat," says Joel. Hearing this, Connor (who espouses inclusivity in interviews) turns away from his own session plan, looks over at Henry and says "Yeah, cos you're gay." This makes several of the boys laugh, although Henry does not laugh. Connor gets 'told off' by the coach leading the group: "Oi, Connor, less of that," the coach says, "now get on with your own work." The boys continue working in silence for a few minutes then the coach calls the group to focus their attention to the front of the class, as each group will now present their session plans to everyone else.

My reading of the above moment from my field notes is not necessarily that Connor's use of 'gay' was homophobic, nor that it was bullying behaviour. Reactionary labelling

of the use of 'gay' as always homophobic is something McCormack (2012) has cautioned against. Instead, McCormack discusses such encounters in terms of 'homosexually-themed' language, encouraging researchers to examine for the *intent* of the words used, the context in which they are used, and the personal values and beliefs of the individuals who use such language.

In CHAPTER SEVEN I highlighted some of the ways in which masculinity was represented among West-Side academy players but mainly coaches. Below I extend this discussion by taking a closer look at boys' use of homo-negative language. In light of the (espoused) inclusivity (but also evidence of complicity) of several of the boys represented in this study, this provides added complexity to my discussion of boyhood masculinities in a professional football academy. The field note excerpt presented above is of interest, because it captures the 'homo-negative' language used by one of the boys, Connor, (potentially) contrasting his claims to inclusivity, as described in the previous sections. This section, then, also highlights how both interview-only and observation-only accounts of boys' masculinities may tell only half the story of boys and men's lives and experiences.

As noted in the previous sections of this chapter, while intellectually there was an acceptance (in interviews) of gay people, I also noted the use of 'gay' as derogatory expression during my time as a coach among these boys. While I did not record exact figures of how frequently this terms was used, I would estimate that I heard "gay" being used once or twice a week over three training sessions. Even if I had attempted to record this use I do not believe it would have been a meaningful figure in terms of actual use, since the times I heard it being used were simply what I had been "fortunate" enough to overhear. Indeed, while it might be useful to have a more accurate picture of the frequency of the use of such homo-negative expressions, it is also important to consider the context of its use. For example, when I overheard boys using expressions like "that's gay" or "stop being gay," and then spoke to these boys about this in our interviews, several boys confirmed that they were "guilty" of doing so; although they protested, that they 'did not mean anything' by it. This is something McCormack (2011, 2012) has also previously discussed.

“When you’re a kid you just say gay all the time,” says George, “Gay this, gay that, but it don’t mean anything. You grow up then you don’t say it as much.” Describing the use of ‘gay’ among his peers at West-Side academy, Jack told me:

This one guy had different boots every training session, well not every time, but he brought different boots a lot, he was the guy known for having every single boot ever made! And I think he got called “gay” sometimes for his boots, mostly for these pink boots he had, bright pink, and I’ve got the new white ones now, I think you should only wear pink if you’re the best player in the world, that’s the only way you can get away with it, and like I had black and pink at the time, and that was fine ‘cos only the tick was pink.

Jack’s comments resonate in light of previous research on a U.S. men’s university-based soccer team (c.f. Adams, 2011) where I considered the wearing of pink cleats (football boots) and the acceptance of pink boots by teammates as a potential signs of changing masculinities. Continuing, Jack described when one of his teammates at West-Side academy was calling another boy “gay” for having pink football boots:

Jack: He was calling him gay, and then [another boy] was like well he’s wearing purple boots so does that make him gay? And he was just like “yeah.” It was typical of him really.

AA: Didn’t that lad have pink boots, too?

Jack: Yeah I think he did at one point! Yeah, I remember that now, he did.

AA: Odd thing to say from someone who wears them himself...

Jack: Yeah that’s kind of what he’s like...I don’t think he meant, oh you’re gay, like actually gay, it’s just a little joke, you know he didn’t mean it, it’s just gonna be a bit controversial if you buy pink boots, so people are just gonna pick up on that.

Not only do Jack’s comments highlight how ‘gay’ was used among these boys, but they contrast previous findings on the meaning and level of masculine ‘controversy’ of pink football boots (c.f. Adams, 2011), although my findings in that research focused on 18-23 year old men on a U.S. university-based soccer team, and therefore caution should be taken when drawing comparisons with 14-15 year old boys in a professional football academy. Moreover, highlighting further how ‘gay’ was used casually among West-Side academy players, another boy, Joel, told me:

It's more just random reasons, random insults someone would give to someone, not for actual proper things, but like if you're going out with this girl, just anything really, just having a bit of banter and someone would turn round and say oh yeah but you're gay, and it's just like really, not the best comeback in the world

Joel also added that: "It's just trying to make everyone laugh, it's expected, no one took it to heart at all." Moreover, boys at West-Side would casually use "gay" (even some of those who told me in interviews that they didn't), to draw attention to (for example) the poor technical execution of a skill either by them or a teammate – for example, by saying "Aw, gay," after making or receiving an inaccurate pass in a warm-up practice. Less frequently deployed, however, were a number of other pejorative phrases, such as "faggot." Indeed, during my time coaching these boys at West-Side, I heard this expression less than a handful of times: more accurately, I documented only three incidents by two different boys. In this respect, it did not appear to be a symptom of the group as a collective. One of the examples of this came when I heard a boy make a comment to his friend and teammate that a younger age group of boys were "soft" because they had occupied the indoor training facility, so that these boys then had to go outside and train, on what was a cold and rainy evening. "They're such faggots," the boy noted to his friend.

On another occasion, during a training session, I heard the same boy say to a teammate, "You're a fucking faggot." I did not see or hear what led up to this moment, but this was the only time I ever heard it prefixed with the intensifier *fucking* – used in this way. I responded as though this use had intent to intimidate the boy it was directed towards. At the time, it felt threatening and not conducive to a safe and secure learning environment. In this moment, I decided to intervene: as the practice continued, I called this boy to the side of the practice area. The incident took me a little by surprise, and I was unsure of how exactly to deal with the situation, but I felt that it was right to step in. I reminded him of the West-Side academy code of conduct that each of them had signed at the start of the season, that is, that behaviour that is aggressive towards other boys and makes them feel scared to express themselves would not be tolerated (I described it as homophobic, and equated it with racist language by comparison to try and connect with how this language was discriminatory): if I heard it again, I said, I would suspend him from training and games. Conscious that I was still coaching and needed to attend to the practice that was still going on, I sent this boy back into the

practice. I wondered if my intervention and the threat of suspension from football activities at West-Side would actually have any effect; it may have served as a 'teachable moment,' but it might equally have simply pushed the behaviour 'underground,' and made those wielding this word more careful about using it around me. This is not something I can claim to be sure of.

I was also aware that the complexity of homophobic/homo-negative language (and the ways in which it hurts *all* boys, not just gay people) was probably not something I could 'deal with' in one 30-second reprimand. This moment serves as a good illustration of the difficulties researchers may face when conducting insider participant observation (which is linked to coaching or teaching roles), since by challenging this language (even though I did so privately and not in front of the whole group) there was a possibility that this impacted on what boys said to me in interviews. For example, other boys *may* have asked him "why was Adi speaking to you?" and he *may* have told them. Thus, while this example was a more extreme example of homo-negative language, it highlighted to me the complex task of challenging homo-negative and gendered language (that is, the casual everyday use of not just "gay," but "girly," and "soft"). This is not necessarily homophobic language, and so tends to go unchallenged in the rounds of everyday life. Ultimately, the moment described above left me feeling that I was not that well equipped to deal with this homo-negative language, and highlighted the lack of formalised (or even informal) training and guidance that academy coaches receive on this issue.

Further evidencing the complexity of language use among this group of boys, I also offer a field-note from my days coaching at West-Side when the use of "gay" by one boy was challenged by one of his teammates. The moment happened when I was walking toward the training field with another coach, about to begin a training session. Three boys were walking alongside us, talking, although I was not fully alert to what they were talking about. "That's so gay, boys," one of the boys said. My colleague and I were still walking next to them as they continued. Upon hearing the use of "gay," I had now "tuned in." One of the other two boys agrees with the first boy. "Yeah I know!" he said. At this point, the third boy, who was part of their conversation, looked at us,

then said to his teammates: “Lads, you shouldn’t say gay, that’s homophobic.” “Oh,” said the first boy, “We weren’t saying it like that.”

Acknowledging that my own influence as a coach in this setting (that is, as someone who tried to demonstrate inclusive values) may have had some “impact” on how this moment played out, I retain caution in suggesting that this single exchange between three adolescent boys is evidence of some kind of organic inclusivity (rather than homophobia), that has emerged among academy footballers as a result of wider social changes and decreasing cultural homophobia. However, more modestly, what this field-note does still provide, I believe, is an interesting and meaningful unit of analysis, since, whether or not this boys’ policing of his teammates’ “gay” discourse was said as tongue-in-cheek or as an attempt to please my coaching colleague and I, it showed that *some* boys at West-Side were aware of the effect of their language on others. Moreover, it may suggest that (potentially), among groups of boys whose coaches are open about opposing forms of sexuality-based discrimination, and who challenge homo-negative language, this may encourage some boys to begin to ask themselves questions about the potentially negative connotations of their language use, regardless of whether or not they were ‘saying it like that.’

9.3 THE ‘ISSUE’ OF GAY FOOTBALLERS

9.3.1 ON THE POSSIBILITY OF GAY TEAMMATES AND OPPONENTS

In the following sections, I explore the contemporary ‘issue’ of gay footballers. While there is now an openly gay player in the U.S. (Robbie Rogers), at the time of conducting this research (2011-2012) there were no openly gay footballers. Thus, I use and problematise the term ‘issue’ to mean two things: firstly, to emphasize the growing interest (in academic research and media) regarding gay footballers (and more accurately, why there are currently no openly-gay footballers in the top English leagues – see for example, Cashmore and Cleland, 2011, 2012; Cleland, 2015). Secondly, since at the time of data collection and writing-up, there were no openly gay footballers, this section has a substantial hypothetical element to it. The ‘issue’ I discussed with these boys in interviews, therefore, was not something they had experienced so far in their lives. This part of my research asked boys at West-Side (in interviews) for their

thoughts and feelings about the prospect of having gay teammates or opponents in their future (potential) football careers, rather than outline lived-experiences.

Highlighting this, Alex noted, “I wouldn’t have thought I’d have a problem with it.” He added, “I don’t think it would affect me. The way I see it football is on the pitch and when you’re out there everyone is on the same playing field.” His statement of “I wouldn’t have *thought* (emphasis added here) I’d have a problem with it” exhibits a degree of hesitation and uncertainty. I follow up on this, asking him if he can elaborate on why he doesn’t “think” he would have a problem with a gay teammate or opponent. “Well, it hasn’t happened yet,” he told me. “So I’ve not had to deal with it have I? So I don’t *actually* know how I’d feel. That’s why I said that.”

Connor shows less hesitation. “Like I said earlier, you are who you are,” he says. In my interview with Connor we talked about the prospect of there being gay footballers in the English professional leagues within his own playing career (if he was to ‘make it’), and perhaps even on his own team. While I had observed Connor saying “that’s gay” multiple times during my time at West-Side academy, it was interesting to hear what he had to say. In some ways this evoked McCormack’s (2011, 2012) contextualisation of boys espousing pro gay attitudes, yet still using homo-negative language. As Connor told me, “I’ve always believed being gay is nothing to be ashamed of.” He also added: “Football shouldn’t get in the way of that. That’s my thinking.” Encouragingly, perhaps, Connor’s ‘thinking’ is shared, to varying degrees, by several of his teammates. For example, as Reece noted: “I don’t have a problem with anyone being gay or anything. They’re still a footballer, they’re still human beings.”

Seemingly supportive but perhaps representing a somewhat more cautious perspective, Alex told me: “What they do off the pitch is kind of their own business.” He added: “But I suppose there would be a little bit of...in the changing room I suppose, it might be a bit weird.” The potential for an initial awkwardness and unease in the team locker room, however, was not something Alex thought should prevent a teammate from coming out. As he suggested:

They might feel excluded, but with coming in all the time training and whatever there'd be time to tell stories and meet and whatever and I think that the gay person could then share their stories.

Interestingly, Reece notes, "It's not their problem is it? It's ours." When I asked him to elaborate on this, he added: "It's just, no one else's business, the fans and stuff, I don't think that should affect how they see a gay player." The above comments from West-Side academy players Alex, Reece and Connor highlight that, while there remains some uncertainty about how a gay player might fit into the masculinised spaces of a professional football club, such as the locker room, for example, there is some evidence that these young players are (intellectually) accepting and supportive of gay players in professional football.

9.3.2 COMING OUT IN PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL: ACADEMY PLAYERS' VIEWS

In this section I outline some of the West-Side academy players' subjective perspectives on what they think the coming out experience would be like for (currently closeted) gay footballers. It is important to note that, at the time these interviews were conducted (2011 and 2012), there were no openly gay footballers in the UK. Indeed, these interviews took place *before* professional footballer Robbie Rogers (formerly of Leeds United in England) came out. Beginning from the assumption that there *are* gay players 'out there,' as is the growing sentiment among English football fans, the British media, and ex-professional players (c.f. Cashmore and Cleland, 2011; Townsend, 2013), I asked these boys at West-Side what they thought might be preventing gay players from coming out, and whether or not they thought gay players ought to publicly acknowledge their (homo)sexuality. The act of coming out is described by these boys as likely to induce 'stick' (i.e. 'banter' and chanting/singing) from opposition fans (rather than 'home' fans), designed to put the players off their game, and opposition fans are described as the principal impediment to gay players coming out or from having a positive coming out experience. Moreover, some of these West-Side academy players expressed the idea that a gay player coming out might have a transformative impact on other closeted gay players coming out in the future; in effect that an openly gay footballer might become a role model. Furthermore, some of these boys suggested that, during their own careers, if a gay player were to come out and play alongside

them on their team, then they would support this gay player, for example, should they endure any abuse from fans.

It was Connor's opinion, for example, that gay players should come out. "In some sense, yeah they should," said Connor. "Like, you always need someone to look up to don't you? So that would be good for the others out there." Similarly, Kyle noted, "I suppose if no one else has come and said it then it'd be a good thing for a gay person to step out." Continuing, Kyle added: "For the younger generation, for some of them who are gay, it wouldn't put them off playing or coming out so much." In addition, Jamie told me: "It's up to them, but if they're good at football then that's what they should be recognised for." Jamie then added that:

If it does happen when I'm playing, say in the future I do have a footballer, a teammate that's gay, then if the fans are on at him then the players should have his back, cos they're his teammates, they're his friends, your players should be like part of your family, you should always help them out with that... You never know how you're gonna react, you can always talk about it like this, but until the circumstance actually does come through you don't know.

"It's a problem though, innit," Jamie told me. "Cos they have the right to be what they want and not feel like they have to leave." He adds:

Cos, if a footballer does come out and says he's gay, all the fans will abuse him and that, and so it does influence them wanting to play the game. It makes them not wanna play football anymore.

In the interview excerpts above, Jamie alludes to a contemporary debate in the professional football climate: indeed, the question of "whose fault" it is that there are no currently openly gay players in the UK was an interesting point of discussion in several of the interviews conducted for this research (for a discussion of this question from the perspective of football fans, see Cashmore and Cleland, 2011). According to this group of boys, it was evident that those to blame were concentrated in the stands, not on the field of play. As Reece told me: "It's the fans that are the main problem, if it was just the players' game then I don't think anyone would have a problem with it." Continuing, Reece also added:

If you were in the dressing room you wouldn't have a problem with it to be fair. It would just be a normal person. It's basic respect for other people. All of my teammates, 100% would say the same. It's just the fans don't accept

it...Obviously I've been to games and you hear people talk in the stands and they obviously don't help people coming out in football, or saying that they're gay or anything like that."

Although Reece told me that, "I wouldn't tell them what to do," he also noted:

But if it was me I would prefer to come out and get the stick and be who you are 'cos you'll be a better person and feel better in yourself.

Another West-Side academy player, George, takes the discussion on 'fan problem' a step further, arguing that most supporters in general probably do not oppose having gay players on their team, but that *opposition* fans would perhaps try and 'target' those players. As the fans in Cashmore and Cleland's (2011) study described it, despite the majority of fans suggesting that homophobia among fans was low, they suggested that fans would try and get "into a player's head." If this meant abusing a player due to his (homo)sexuality, then so be it.

Unaware of this research, of course, George explains the way he sees things:

I don't think people on their own team or their own fans would care. Its more people try to pick out someone, and say something against them to get the edge. Not because they're homophobic, but that's just what happens in football, you get the people that like to target people cos that's an easy thing to pick up on. Could be drugs or alcohol, not just being gay.

George seems to suggest that the capacity for acceptance of gay players is already there in the sport of football, both on the field and in the stands. However, from his subjective viewpoint, the prevalence of a win-at-all-costs mentality and a competitive desire among fans to "get the edge" on opponents and help their team to victory is a potential factor in limiting the creation of a supportive atmosphere for the coming out of gay players.

Providing another interesting perspective on this topic, Alex suggested that the majority of fans would be fine with a gay footballer, but a minority would not; it would be the "extreme fans," he says, that would be against it. Moreover, Alex also added that there would be some "extreme players" who would be against it, and "have their say," too. As Alex told me: "It's just the one person in the stand, or the one player who has the negative view who gets heard, then everyone gets blamed when it's only one of them." The possibility (perhaps, likelihood) of gay players "emerging" in the near future,

however, does (potentially) set up a moral dilemma for fans and players who harbour homophobic views but then find that a gay player has/is signed to *their* team; particularly if this gay player is a “top player” who scored many goals for his team and brought them success. As West-Side academy player George noted: “Their attitudes would change.” As George told me: “I think they would defend their own, especially if he was banging in goals.” Moreover, as Jamie noted:

If they do come out then the fans will think they can put him off, they'll chant at him saying “that's gay” and all that, then probably get into his head and he might be thinking “I should've never done this, I'll never play this game again,” and he won't wanna play football anymore and he won't enjoy it. So it's important that they have teammates that say something to help them, like that's what you expect from your teammates to pick you up when things aren't good.

Similarly, Jack told me: “If gay people think they're not accepted then they might not play. If straight people show that they are accepted then more people might feel they can play, and then feel like they can be open.” However, a caveat to Jack's supportive attitude toward future gay football players, that is, his position as someone who has expressed pro-gay “inclusive” values, is that he shows little desire at the prospect of *publicly* showing his support, thus revealing a *passive, concealed, and politically-docile* brand of inclusive masculinity: As Jack told me: “Personally I wouldn't say anything, but I think that it's good they do, like straight people saying that they accept gay people, takes a lot to say that.”

9.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In summary, what I have achieved in this chapter is an assessment of boys' attitudes toward homosexuality (a significant tenet of masculinity). In short, this chapter amounts to an interrogation of the part of masculinity—homophobia—that Messner (1987, 1992) described as being compulsory. My findings hint at a form of masculinity that is inclusive toward homosexuality and—important in the context of professional football—a form of masculinity in which acceptance is shown toward gay footballers. Yet, I also discuss this inclusivity in a more nuanced fashion; a form of inclusivity that sometimes remains entwined with complicity. The final interview excerpt from Jack (it's good that people stand up for gay people, but personally he wouldn't say anything), is indicative of the (concealed, and politically-underdeveloped) ‘strength’ of their inclusivity at this moment in time; that is, the level of their individual agency to express their inclusivity

publicly. Despite this, I am encouraged by the data presented in this chapter that the potential exists among these boys for a transformative, public, political inclusivity to emerge as they progress (potentially) into professional careers.

This data, therefore, offers some evidence for (internal) inclusivity at the adolescent age groups in a professional football academy, suggesting that cultural change is filtering down to academy players even below the 'scholarship years' (16-18 years) as evidenced by Magrath et al (2013). Yet, privately-held inclusive beliefs and values as expressed in interviews did not necessarily mean that these boys were *active* in their (internal) inclusivity; indeed, problematising notions of inclusivity and recognising that different club cultures may be at play, the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that silence and complicity in the face of gendered-language remains normative among the West-Side academy players I interviewed. This draws some parallels with research I have previously conducted on a men's university football team (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010). The men on that team were 'failed' academy footballers, and in light of the findings in this chapter, it can perhaps be argued that it was in the academy setting that those men had learned their acceptance of the gendered-narratives of their coaches. What makes the data presented in this chapter interesting is that evidence of inclusivity was found. In this regard, my findings support the empirical findings of Anderson (2009) and colleagues (c.f. Magrath, Roberts, and Anderson, 2013), although I retain a caution in describing the masculinities of these West-Side boys as 'inclusive.'

While there is evidence of espoused (internal) inclusivity toward homosexual peers and gay footballers, there is also evidence of complicity. Undertaking this research from an inclusive masculinities perspective with an emphasis on men's (internal) relations with other men, I also acknowledge the lack of opportunity in this analysis to examine how the masculinities exhibited by these boys fits into (external) gender relations, that is the relation *between* genders (between men and women, boys and girls). I therefore remain cautious in describing the data in this analysis as evidence of inclusive masculinities per se, and instead favour a theorisation of the masculinities at play in this setting along the lines of *hybrid masculinities* as described by Demetriou (2001) and Bridges (2014).

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

10.1 THESIS OVERVIEW AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The world of professional football and the experiences of those embroiled within the game at both adult (18+ years-old) and academy levels (16-18 years-old) has been the focus of much social research in recent years (c.f. Brown and Potrac, 2009; Cashmore and Cleland, 2011; 2012; Cleland, 2013; Cushion and Jones, 2006; 2014; Kelly and Waddington, 2006; McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005; Magrath, Anderson, and Roberts, 2013; Manley, Palmer and Roderick, 2012; McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006; Monk, 2000; Monk and Russell, 2000; Nelson, Potrac, Gilbourne, Allanson, Gale, and Marshall, 2013; Parker, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006; Potrac and Jones, 2009a; 2009b; Potrac, Jones, Gilbourne, and Nelson, 2012; Roderick 2006ab; 2012ab). However, despite this growing body of research and awareness of ‘what goes on’ in the professional football industry and ‘what goes on’ in the lives of young men today, research on the youth programmes (football academies) of professional clubs has been severely lacking. So far, no social research has critically examined the experiences of youth academy players at the ‘foundation phase’ (9-11) or ‘youth phase’ (12-15).

This current research, therefore, being the first study to explore the experiences of youth phase academy footballers, makes some empirical contributions to the field. My data highlight how competition was embedded in the fabric of life at West-Side academy. This thesis makes connections between the hyper-competitive ‘neoliberal’ rationality that is embedded in everyday economic, political, cultural and social life (Coakley, 2011) and the market-driven professional football industry, within which football academies operate. My data highlight how the structural organisation of football academies such as West-Side – an institution which is ultimately designed to produce adult professional footballers (marketable assets) for economic benefit – embeds a culture of competition, insecurity and masculinity among young footballers. I have explored the idea (Coakley, 2011; Giroux, 2011; Brown, 2003) that a neoliberal rationality not only restructures markets, but also social establishments and consequently human lives.

Related to this, in an attempt to describe how institutions can play an important role in shaping how people feel and act, I have also drawn some comparisons throughout this thesis between Goffman's (1961) (total) institutions and the football academy. As Goffman (1961, p.15) writes: "Every institution captures something of the time and interest of its members and provides something of a world for them; in brief, every institution has encompassing tendencies." At West-Side, my data suggest those encompassing tendencies may be tied to a market-driven objective: that is, the fact that West-Side exists to produce professional players for the (economic) benefit of the football club. In this thesis, I have identified the existence of a number of processes of mortification and curtailments of self 'in play' at West-Side football academy. Adopting Goffman's vocabulary, it is possible that the (perhaps, unintentional) intention of these mortifying moments was to work on, shape, and code boys into (masculinised) objects that would fit more easily with the 'standards' of West-Side football academy and the beliefs that individual coaches had about what it means to be a man. Playing out (a large part) of their lives in this institution, I argue that boys' experience of West-Side football academy is one in which they are structured into a 'machinery' that restricts the development of meaningful social relationships with others. When Goffman (1961, p.280) writes that it is only "against something" that identities are constructed, perhaps my data are revealing of the "something" (that is, the prevailing arrangements and institutional objectives) in this social setting that boys construct their identities against: in other words, I view boys' peer relationships and friendships at West-Side not as some psychological inability to develop emotional intimacy, but as tied-into a debilitating and restrictive institutional context that "obliges" them "to be of a given character" (Goffman, 1961, p.165).

In this vein, my data highlight the peculiarities of boys' friendships on the inside of the academy, suggesting that the competitive academy setting may alter the ways that 'friendships' are experienced for young people. Emerging from the data was the idea that, for many boys, competition was an obstacle to developing emotional-proximity with others. This is in stark contrast to the view of sport as being a great place to make friends. Friendships in this setting were structured such that they typically lacked trust, intimacy or the ability to express one's worries or vulnerability. Perhaps most disconcerting about this data was that 'friendships' lacking in emotional-proximity were

considered friendships – suggesting that, for these boys, inauthentic, non-intimate interactions have become normalised and simply part of the process of being an academy footballer.

Furthermore, drawing on recent research and theorising in the field of masculinities suggesting that the social landscape of masculinities is changing rapidly toward more ‘inclusive’ forms (e.g. Anderson, 2009) this current research is the first study of a professional football academy setting informed by Anderson’s (2009) theory of *inclusive masculinities*. Previously, I have utilised inclusive masculinities to inform my analysis of masculinities among university-aged men on a U.S. college soccer team (c.f. Adams, 2011), while Magrath et al. (2013) have applied inclusive masculinities to a football academy setting with young men (aged 16-19). This current research, then, is the first study to-date of the (gendered) experiences and attitudes of youth academy footballers (14-15 year old boys) informed by inclusive masculinities.

This thesis, therefore, provides an assessment of a group of adolescent male football academy players’ attitudes toward homosexuality. My data suggests inclusive attitudes toward homosexuality and gay athletes among this group of boys. This is a significant finding, since no previous study has documented these attitudes among boys of this age and in this professional football academy setting. This data offers some support for the suggestion that a possible cultural change (with regards to masculinity and acceptance of homosexuality) is filtering down to youth academy players, even below the ages (16-18 years old) evidenced by Magrath et al. (2013). However, drawing on my observation and interview data as well as competing theoretical perspectives (Connell, 1995; Demetriou, 2001; Bridges, 2014), I also discuss this inclusivity in a more nuanced fashion: I describe a form of inclusivity that sometimes remains entwined with complicity.

Finally, this thesis offers a methodological contribution to the field. As discussed in the methodology chapter of this thesis (CHAPTER FIVE), this is the first study to examine a professional football academy from an ‘insider’ perspective (c.f. Merton, 1972); that is, it is the first study to be conducted by an academy football coach who was already embedded in the academy setting prior to beginning research. This was a pragmatic

approach in which I capitalised on my occupation as an already-embedded academy coach in this setting to develop a researcher position of ‘complete-participant’ (c.f Gold, 1958) that would likely be unattainable by most social researchers, particularly given the closed nature of professional football. My use of participant observations combined with in-depth semi-structured interviews provided rich data for this thesis. I have argued that the adoption of a strategy for gaining consent for observations retrospectively was useful in negotiating the practical problem of observation (the Hawthorne effect), although I also recognise that I was a coach who was paid to observe boys’ performances on the field which they were fully aware of, too. Retrospective consent to use observation data, therefore, was a strategy developed as a compromise between limiting disruption to participants in this setting and as a way to ensure ethical obligations of social research were upheld. All participants were given a chance to opt-out of having their data used. In this sense, my approach to consent did not follow programmatic rules, and instead came from a more ‘situational’ perspective (c.f. Calvey, 2008; Spicker, 2011). I have argued that this approach, while unconventional in social research, was attentive to ethical regulations and concerns, did not cause harm or put participants at risk of harm, and was sensitive to the rights of participants.

10.2 RESEARCH BACKGROUND AND AIMS

Central to this thesis is the institutional setting of the football academy. As Stratton et al. (2004, p.20) have acknowledged, the purpose of the football academy is to “develop players for the first team or (at least) generate income through the sale of ‘marketable assets.’” In a romantic sense, the football academy is a place where a local boy is ‘developed’ from eight or nine years of age, with the hope that he will one day go on to pull on the shirt of the club that he has grown up playing for: ‘Every boy’s dream,’ as Ged Roddy, Director of Youth at the English Premier League has described this process. The notion that becoming a professional footballer is every boy’s dream is, of course, misleading since not *every* boy actually wants to be a footballer. Moreover, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, the dream-infused depiction of the journey toward becoming a professional footballer and sustaining a career in professional football, is a somewhat sanitised account.

Contemporary research on the professional football industry has described it as a place rife with intimidation, violence, and abuse (Kelly and Waddington, 2006; Magee, 1998), as an occupational domain riddled with authoritarianism, ruthlessness and hyper-masculine work practices (Parker, 1996; 2006), and as a competitive, calculating and often ‘uncaring’ environment where selfishness and ‘backstabbing’ are on the agenda (Potrac et. al., 2012). The careers of professional footballers have been described as precarious and insecure where there is an “ever present possibility of career failure and rejection” (Roderick, 2006b, p.246), while becoming a professional footballer has been described as incompatible with educational attainment (McGillivray et al., 2005; McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006) and a career path which demands significant social sacrifices in order to ‘make the grade’ (Brown and Potrac, 2009).

In the introduction to this thesis, I borrowed from the thoughts of sociologist Norbert Elias (1970) to note that all humans go through social processes *among* other human beings, and through these experiences their identities are continuously shaped and re-shaped; that is, as (social) human beings we are *always still becoming* who we are today. As Elias (1970, p.121) suggested, children “learn from others how to speak and even how to think.” What Elias alludes to here is the importance of social learning (and teaching) in *constructing* particular ‘ways of being’ in the world. Thoughts, beliefs, values, and actions, therefore, might be better thought of as learned, taught, and (actively, yet sometimes unconsciously) cultivated, rather than being biologically ingrained – although biology may play a part in some aspects of life. The importance of social (learning and teaching) in the human life-course is something I have explored more deeply in the theoretical chapter of this thesis (c.f. Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Goffman, 1961; Connell, 1987, 1995; Anderson, 2009). Indeed, this idea or school of thought (social constructionism) has underpinned the methodological design of this thesis and the way in which I have analysed observation and interview data.

In this thesis I have presented participant observation and interview data from an ethnographic study of masculinities within the youth academy of West-Side football club, a professional football club in the South West of England. The overall aim of this thesis has been to examine, interpret and understand the experiences of boys in a

professional football academy, including their relationships with other boys and men in this setting. The objectives of this thesis were:

- I. To explore (i) the social organisation of a professional football academy and (ii) representations of masculinity among coaches and youth players in this setting;
- II. To develop an understanding of what being 'friends' means within the social parameters of boys' football academy experience, and;
- III. To examine for homophobia (a central tenet of traditional masculinity), and understandings of homosexuality and gay athletes among academy players.

In the following sections I discuss the key findings of this thesis, focusing on friendships and masculinities inside West-Side academy. These sections include discussions around both the empirical *and* theoretical contributions of this research. Following this, I conclude with a short discussion of the methodological contributions of this thesis, end with some thoughts on what implications the findings presented in this research might have for professional football academies, society in general, and future research. I turn first to my findings on friendships and peer-relationships at West-Side.

10.3 FRIENDSHIPS

In line with Weiss and Smith's (1999) suggestion that any discussion of a youth sport setting should consider the motivational-climate at play, as well as Coakley's (2011) discussion of elite, organised sport as neoliberalism-in-action, in CHAPTER SIX I explored the social organisation of West-Side football academy. I highlighted how boys' experiences at West-Side were organised around a sense of being in competition with each other, and that West-Side operates as an elite, organised, competitive, and commercial sport enterprise, aligning it with Coakley's (2011) conceptualisation of sports, and distinguishing it from physical education, physical activity, or exercise. It is in this climate of performance and competition (at the 'extreme' end of the sport spectrum) that I explored boys' peer-relationships and friendships.

In CHAPTER EIGHT, my discussion of boys' peer-relationships or 'friendships' inside West-Side academy was informed by Anderson's (2009) *inclusive masculinities*. Anderson (2009) suggests that 'emotional-proximity' is an indicator of inclusive

masculinities (in contrast to physically and emotionally conservative forms) and so to examine for inclusive masculinities (and also the impact of competition on peer-relationships) I analysed the ability of boys to trust each other and to develop 'deep' friendships in the context of an elite, organised, competitive sport setting. My data highlight the peculiarities of boys' 'friendships' inside West-Side academy, and indicate that competitive sports settings (such as a professional football academy) may significantly alter the parameters of how 'friendships' can be lived and experienced for young people. Boys at West-Side failed to develop 'deep' friendships with other boys at the club; their peer-relationships, even when boys described each other as 'friends', were devoid of trust and emotional intimacy (i.e. emotional proximity). Since these same boys seemed to be able to develop closer friendships with boys *outside* of the academy (perhaps expressing the emotional-proximity of Anderson's inclusive masculinities), the data presented in this thesis suggest that competition (part of the fabric of life at West-Side football academy) is implicated negatively in the process of friendship-building. The evidence presented here strongly suggests that institutionalised competition hindered the capability of these academy players to develop emotional-proximity.

10.3.1 TRUST, INTIMACY AND EMOTIONAL-PROXIMITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INSTITUTIONALISED HIERARCHY AND COMPETITION

Conceptualising the football academy as a form of institution (Goffman, 1961), perhaps the most significant point to emerge from the data I have presented on friendships was support for the idea (e.g., Carr, 2012; Messner, 1992; Ommundsen et al., 2005) that hierarchy and competition were woven into the fabric of academy life (and therefore into the life-world of boys themselves) and were, for many, a significant impediment to the development of emotional-proximity (i.e. trust, intimacy, and the expression of vulnerability). Speaking to the effects of hierarchies and competition on boys peer-relationships, over two decades ago, Messner (1992, p.34) suggested that:

Given the fact that one's own 'success' is the flip-side of another's 'failure,' organized sport encourages boys to view other boys not as intimates, but as rivals. Within the competitive world, the chief question a boy may ask himself when confronted with another boy is, 'Can I take him?'

The data presented in both CHAPTER SIX (competitive social organisation of West-Side) and CHAPTER EIGHT (friendships) provided support for the fact that many of the

boys 'approached each other' from such a perspective and that one of the consequences was a reticence to 'genuinely trust' (even) those considered to be 'best mates' with 'personal stuff,' 'weaknesses,' and vulnerability. In the context of West-Side academy this seemed to lead to slightly less authentic friendships, where many boys felt the need to 'hold back' significant parts of the self in order to protect against a perceived risk of compromising their hierarchical status by exposing themselves to their rivals. Furthermore, it seemed to be the case that (implicitly accepting such rivalry and hierarchy) boys accepted the need to subjugate or sacrifice this trust and intimacy in the context of their academy friendships, almost seeming to accept these slightly less authentic presentations of themselves as a 'natural' part of their peer (dis)connections in the context of the academy. Reflecting on this data, I am concerned that in the midst of the hierarchical structural forces that set the parameters within which academy boys' 'performances' are judged and inspected, that expectations of what 'friendships' are might drift towards a normalisation of less authentic, non-intimate interactions that are taken on board as 'part of the act.'

Finding nobody around them in the academy who can accept (or with whom they feel comfortable to express) displays of their authentic selves, they perceive that they must evade, sidestep, or push back such authenticity. The extent to which young people in the context of elite sport academies are caught in such a 'bind' and the psycho-social impact it has upon them requires significant and urgent attention. What is more, it is also interesting that some of the boys in my research felt the extended pressure to 'perform' in accordance with their academy identity (i.e., proving their footballing 'worth,' being the 'academy boy') in contexts outside of the academy. It is also potentially disconcerting that the criteria to which boys are held (and hold themselves) accountable inside the academy are transported and 'bleed into' the life-world outside of the academy structure. That is, boys felt under pressure to maintain, justify, and upkeep their academy identity, hierarchical status, and value as a footballer in the context of their outside relationships too.

10.3.2 THE COSTS TO OUTSIDE FRIENDSHIPS

Some might deem it acceptable that boys are less able to find deep, intimate, emotional connections in the context of academy friendships *if* they were able to find and nurture

such connections in life outside of the academy (indeed, it is likely that many boys do). However, my data also supported previous contentions (e.g., Patrick et al., 1999) by suggesting that involvement in the academy structure also had ramifications for the quality of the connections boys were able to maintain and nurture outside of the academy (although I acknowledge that other local factors may have played a role in shaping outside friendships). Specifically, boys spoke (a) of feeling as though they needed to make a choice between absorption in outside friendships and 'being a footballer,' and (b) of being unable to shed their identity as an 'academy boy' in the context of relationships on the outside. This finding is an interesting reflection of how identities that are tied to the 'institutional self' (i.e., the academy boy) can be legitimized and firmly situated at the heart of individuals' life-world in the workplace and (most importantly) beyond.

In my data, a similar invasion of boys' 'non-academy world' by their 'academy selves' seems to be an issue worth noting. That is, being an 'academy boy' not only presented challenges to the creation of meaningful emotional connections inside the academy but also 'ate into' the nature of boys' friendships on the outside. That is, boys seemed 'held back' from full engagement, experimentation, and social connection on the outside of the academy (a) because of factors such as the time commitments, training, and lifestyle choices imposed by the academy, and (b) because their outside friendships were inevitably 'coloured' by the 'academy boy' identity that 'stuck' on the outside too.

10.3.3 VIEWING EMOTIONAL SACRIFICE AND DISCONNECTION AS 'WORTH IT'

In light of the above, an additional point of interest was the extent to which many boys perceived the relational sacrifices made outside of the academy (i.e., the choice between 'being a footballer' and friends outside of the academy) to be 'worth it.' This tended to be justified by rationalising to themselves that absorption in 'outside friendships' and social gatherings would get in the way of becoming a professional footballer, of "being what I wanna be" (Connor, p.185), of "something worthwhile" (Toby, p.185) or "get[ting] a career out of it" (Will, p.186). Among some boys there was a sense of pride in this sacrifice and disconnection, perhaps representing what Goffman (1961) has described as the *colonization* of the self, a disciplining of self-

activity, of *being*, towards the aims, beliefs, and values of the institution. Providing further insight into the effects of institutions on the self, Goffman (1961) suggested that as individuals' desire for one institutional group increases, it can also potentially disconnect them from the 'outside' world.

In the context of football academies, I am concerned that my data reflect the fact that one of the key psychological characteristics that might be mobilised in this colonization process for such boys is a *critically unquestioned* belief that an inhibited platform for deep, meaningful social connection is a worthy and necessary sacrifice to make for the *chance* to become a professional footballer. In this respect, I am also concerned that boys may be powerless to *critically interrogate* this unquestioned belief and that perhaps they are not given the opportunity to do so within the academy structure and are required, seduced, and enticed into subjugating these aspects of themselves (c.f. Anderson, 2013). In light of this finding, a challenge for football academies moving forward is to figure out practically how to encourage and nurture deep and meaningful social bonds as part of the hyper-competitive academy experience.

10.4 MASCULINITIES

10.4.1 ORTHODOX MASCULINITIES

In CHAPTER SEVEN, I highlighted how coaches (particularly in conversations with colleagues but also in conversations with boys themselves) represented masculinity in particular (more 'orthodox') ways and in doing so suggested particular ingrained personal ideas about what it means (to them) to be a man, such as being 'tough', not crying, not being 'girly.' The comments of coaches were not, however, delivered in aggressive tones (unlike in previous research – c.f. Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010). The comments of coaches at West-Side were also not explicitly homophobic or sexist. Instead, representations of masculinity were embedded in casual, relaxed and well-meaning 'banter' (such as some coaches greeting boys arriving at West-Side as 'ladies' – p.182), in which boys also (mostly) seemed to be enjoying the interactions. I framed these coach-athlete conversations (in which masculine narratives were smuggled into play) through my previous conceptualisation of *masculinity-establishing discourse* (Adams, Anderson, and McCormack, 2010), and I argue that this was at play among coaches at West-Side football academy.

Importantly, I do not suggest that these narratives were expressed as part of some conscious scheme to indoctrinate boys into particular forms of masculinity, nor that socialisation is one-way between coaches and academy players, but that coaches' gendered expressions may be representative of coaches' own *personal* ideas about gender, masculinity, and what it means to be a man (and 'what it takes' to become a professional footballer). This may contribute to how boys at West-Side (and other academies) think about themselves and others in relation to gender, masculinity, and sexuality.

10.4.2 INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES

In CHAPTER NINE, I explored the attitudes of a group of adolescent boys toward homosexuality and the contemporary issue of gay athletes within one professional football academy in the South West of England. Other research in the field of masculinities has also recently focused on increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuality among young men (c.f. Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2009; McCormack and Anderson, 2014). This has included some research exploring this topic in the context of the professional football industry; for example, Cleland and Cashmore's (2013) large-scale quantitative internet-based survey of fans and Magrath, Anderson, and Roberts' (2013) small-sample qualitative interview-based survey of young professionals both suggest a growing acceptance of homosexuality and gay athletes within the professional football industry. Both studies acknowledge a general cultural shift (in Western societies) toward more progressive forms of masculinity, and suggest that these progressive values are now beginning to emerge among multiple stakeholders in the traditionally conservative arena of professional sport.

Indeed, some of the data I have presented in this chapter is also suggestive of inclusive attitudes towards homosexuality. There is, for example, evidence for inclusivity among the boys at West-Side, suggesting that inclusivity toward homosexuality may even exist below the scholarship and young professional age groups (16-19 years) as evidenced by Magrath et al (2013). However, I retain some caution in describing the masculinities of these West-Side boys as conclusively 'inclusive.' Below, I draw on Connell's (1987, 1995) concept of *complicit masculinity* and also the notion of *hybrid* masculinities as explored by Demetriou (2001) and Bridges (2014).

10.4.3 COMPLICIT-INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES

It is important here to acknowledge that the data presented in this thesis do not amount to conclusive evidence of an over-arching inclusivity (c.f. Anderson, 2009) among today's youth footballers, nor did I recognise these boys to be as formidably inclusive as the young professionals represented in the research of Magrath et al., (2013). It appears from the data that, although elements of inclusivity are evident among these boys from West-Side football academy, there also remain some less-inclusive, problematic elements of 'traditional' masculinity. In particular, while several boys discussed a positive perspective on homosexuality and gay athletes, there was evidence that 'inclusivity' was sometimes accompanied by aspects of 'complicit' masculinity (c.f. Connell, 1987, 1995), for example in knowing (and sometimes socialising with) gay peers but remaining silent or 'going along' with jokes about gay peers at school.

To clarify what is meant by complicit masculinity, Connell (1995, p.79-80) writes that: "A great many men who draw the patriarchal dividend also respect their wives and mothers, are never violent towards women, do their accustomed share of the housework, bring home the family wage, and can easily convince themselves that feminists must be bra-burning extremists." According to Connell, men who fail to challenge the hegemonic project of domination, subordination, and marginalisation, and thus avoid the tensions or risks of being 'frontline troops' (ibid p.79) in the fight to deconstruct patriarchy, are *complicit*; that is, complicit men gain generally from the subordination of other men, and women.

This relationship, between inclusivity and complicity is one that adds complexity to this discussion of masculinities. The data presented in this thesis challenges claims that can be made about what it really means to be 'inclusive'. There is evidence in the data presented here that, even though a 'harder' more 'orthodox' masculinity might be exhibited or adopted in public spaces, for example among school peers, for some of these boys, there appear to be individual progressive elements of masculinity at play when they talk about supporting gay athletes as being the right thing to do, and how gay athletes deserve the opportunity to play the game, too, without homo-negative repercussions. Thus, this data may demonstrate that inclusivity is not an 'all or nothing'

brand of masculinity and that masculinities that incorporate elements of inclusivity may fluctuate along a spectrum of 'inclusivity' and 'orthodoxy' depending on various contexts and situations, perhaps even changing over time. Of interest is what happens to these inclusive-complicit masculinities as adolescent boys enter early adulthood and beyond. In this sense, just as a 'softening' of masculinity is not indicative of inclusive masculinity, a move toward inclusive forms of masculinity may not necessarily equate to a definitive 'softening' of masculinity.

The data presented in this thesis highlight the sometimes contradictory performances of masculinity that can co-exist among boys—in this case in a competitive professional football academy context. What has emerged in the analysis chapters is an understanding of boyhood masculinities (in a competitive, performance-climate) as having not been *totally* liberalised from the strictures of 'traditional' masculinities in this setting. However, there *is* evidence of emerging inclusivity in terms of boys' (espoused) attitudes toward homosexuality. This is despite boys telling me that their own individual inclusivity remains very much a personal set of beliefs and values; meaning their inclusivity toward homosexuality tends to remain dampened and not expressed among peers in 'public' view.

While these boys expressed their inclusivity to me in interviews, their inability to put this into action must be taken into account in this analysis. As the ancient proverb goes, if a tree falls in the woods but nobody is around in to hear it, how can we be sure that it really fell? Unlike in Magrath et al.'s (2013) study in which young professional players (16-19 years-old) said they would speak up against homophobia, and expressed that they would physically assault others who homophobically abused a (hypothetical) gay teammate, the boys in my study told me that they did not speak up when their schoolmates were telling jokes about gay peers. Moreover, while some suggested that heterosexual football players publicly expressing their support for gay players was a good thing, it was not something they said they would do. These boys might be considered inclusive for their personal values, but it remains to be seen how their values on gender and homosexuality find expression as they move toward early adulthood. Currently, in the context of this study, their passivity in terms of personal

inclusive values may be viewed by some as problematic for those who would describe these boys as representing inclusive masculinities.

This is because progressive attitudes toward homosexuality that are not expressed might simply be interpreted as ‘complicity’ to dominant, or ‘hegemonic,’ masculinities (c.f. Connell, 1987). If the boys above are to be described as representing inclusive masculinities, then they might more accurately be described as representing a *complicit-inclusive* form. In this sense, explorations of masculinities, and in particular research that investigates ‘inclusivity’ might benefit from asking what it really means to be ‘inclusive’ in broader social and cultural contexts and by also taking into account a number of other dimensions or cultural markers of inclusivity and masculinities in general (for example, perceptions of idealised cultural masculinity, male role models, and aspirations for future personal masculinity). In doing so, masculinities scholarship can continue to interrogate recent progressive changes to masculinities in Western cultures; masculinities scholarship must therefore endeavour to keep up with these changes in its efforts to understand contemporary masculinities in sport, and beyond.

10.4.4 HYBRID MASCULINITIES

In the final part of this discussion, I reflect back on the data generated as part of this thesis in relation to Demetriou’s (2001) concept of *hybridity*. According to Demetriou, the analysis of masculinities ought to take into account the adaptability of hegemonic forms. Demetriou suggests that masculinities can reconfigure themselves to incorporate fragments of other masculinities; for example, hegemonic forms can subsume aspects of subordinated masculinities in novel ways, bringing them into the mainstream of what is acceptable in a culture and (in the process) continuing to reproduce patriarchal values. In this way, masculinities can change, become more egalitarian (c.f. Anderson, 2005, 2009) and/or give the appearance of becoming more egalitarian (c.f. Bridges, 2014), while still protecting the interests of particular groups of men. It is possible that the data presented in this thesis are representations of changing, hybridized forms of masculinities, and would therefore be explainable through Connell’s (1995) hegemonic masculinities.

Importantly, the data suggest that the espoused inclusivity of these boys toward homosexuality is evidence of progressive, inclusive values. Like the men in Bridges’

(2014) study, the boys at West-Side academy appear to have challenged the relationship between masculinity and homophobia. However, it is unclear from my data how these boys challenge gender inequality. As Bridges (2014) has suggested, it *is* possible that the relationship between homophobia and masculinity may have *transformed* rather than disappeared, and that hybrid masculine practices may conceal certain privileges. Acknowledging that West-Side football academy is a (almost totally) gender-segregated space (i.e. boys-only teams, no female coaches, and just two women in peripheral support roles), this current study *does not* address matters of gender equality, attitudes, behaviours, and power-relations that exist in the social relationships that these boys have with the girls and women in their lives; in this regard, by not taking account of these variety of cultural markers of masculinity, this study cannot definitively reduce masculinities in this setting to *either* ‘inclusive’ or ‘orthodox.’

10.5 REFLECTIONS ON THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS THESIS

As outlined above, this thesis makes a number of contributions. However, as with any social research it also has its limitations. Indeed, while this research presents an in-depth exploration of “what goes on” in a professional football academy, below I identify some potential limitations of the research presented in this thesis, including: (i) the number of participants; (ii) the age of the participants; and, (iii) the one-team focus of the study.

Firstly, it is important to note that the research design I developed had a pragmatic element to it. The fact that I was a part-time researcher meant that the potential sites for study were limited. It was simply not practical for me to spend time in, study and compare a number of different sites and thus it was not possible, time-wise, to develop this research beyond the one-team focus that I adopted. Furthermore, because I sought to explore boy’s experiences in-depth and (for this purpose) adopted an ethnographic approach using participant observation and interviews, the implementation of these methods were (by their nature) more time-consuming than other more quantitative methods, such as large-scale questionnaires and surveys. Thus, I was only able to generate data on one football academy. While I argue below that this should not detract from the contribution of this research, this did mean that my sample size was relatively small and homogenous, and a one-team focus was

taken, meaning that the findings presented in this research should be generalised with caution. While other football academies will share broad similarities in terms of structure and function, they will differ in their make-up, for example, in terms of social class, race and ethnicity of coaches and players.

Furthermore, with regard to the small sample size of this study, based on their examination of 83 qualitative (interview) studies, Marshall, Cardon, Poddar and Fontenot (2014) recommend that researchers conducting qualitative studies should generally include between 20 and 30 interviews or in single case studies between 15 and 30 interviews. Having conducted interviews with 12 academy footballers my research falls just shy of these recommendations. However, it should be noted that this research is not simply an interview-based study: interviews are paired with participant observation and some detailed accounts of the inner working of a professional football academy from a unique researcher perspective. Thus, rather than thinking about this research as not having *enough* interviews, I propose that a more suitable framework for justifying qualitative research such as this, is whether or not it has secured *enough* data and enough *meaningful* data. While acknowledging that this research is limited, for example, in its ability to generalise from a small sample size and a one-team focus to other boys of various age groups at other football academies, I seek to briefly propose some alternative criteria for judging the quality of the qualitative inquiry I have undertaken in this thesis.

Tracy (2010, p.841) notes that high-quality qualitative research is distinguished by “a rich complexity of abundance” and when judging qualitative research readers should be concerned more with the connections between the “rigor” of a piece of research and its “richness” and “face validity” – that is, whether study appears on face value to be reasonable and appropriate – than with quantitative and positivistic judgement criteria such as reliability and generalisability. Furthermore, Tracy (2010, *ibid*) writes that “if data are new, unique, or rare, a valuable contribution could be achieved with very little data,” arguing that: “There is no magic amount of time in the field. The most important issue to consider is whether the data will provide for and substantiate meaningful and significant claims.” Advocating a model for quality in qualitative research, Tracy (2010, p.844) also recognises “resonance” (comprising “aesthetic

merit” and “transferability”) as a useful criteria for evaluating qualitative research, using the term resonance to “refer to research’s ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience.”

Given that an ethnographic methodology is extensively qualitative and engages in in-depth study to “produce historically and culturally located situated knowledge...[that] can never seamlessly generalize to predict future practice” (Tracy, 2010, p.845), I ask readers when considering the quality of this thesis as a piece of qualitative research, that they reflect on some of the judgment criteria of qualitative research that Tracy (2010) has outlined, including: (i) the richness of the data presented, (ii) the face validity of the research and whether or not it appears reasonable and appropriate, (iii) the meaningfulness of the data and the value of its contribution, (iv) the aesthetic merit of this research (i.e. was it presented with clarity? Was it evocative and did it affect readers?), and (v) the transferability (rather than generalisability) of the data (i.e. did readers who have experienced a similar setting feel as though the story of the research overlapped with their own situations?).

10.6 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As well as masculinities researchers being generally cognizant of and engaging with the literature on hybrid masculinities to ‘unpick’ the style and substance of emerging ‘more inclusive’ masculinities more rigorously, future research specifically in the study of youth academy footballers would benefit from interrogating boys’ emerging inclusivity toward homosexuality in conjunction with aspects of inclusive masculinities which might, as Bridges (2014, p.80) has noted, “simultaneously assert heterosexual masculine identities, to distance themselves from stigmatizing stereotypes of masculinity.” This is the forthcoming challenge of contemporary research on men and masculinities. Further, in line with this challenge, research should also pay specific attention to boys and men’s relationships with girls and women, that is, on *inter-gender* relations; rather than a narrow focus on intra-gender relations as has been the case in this current research and in previous research on academy footballers (e.g. Magrath et al., 2013). Roderick (2012ab) has begun to do this at the professional level of the game, in his research on family life and job relocation, and the ways in which relocation is negotiated between professional footballers and their female partners.

Moreover, future research on masculinities among youth academy players would also benefit from a more nuanced understanding of social class with regards to attitudes toward homosexuality and gay athletes, something which has been limited in previous research in this area. Admittedly, I did not collect sufficient data on social class in this study to do this myself, although having a 'feel' for the study setting and the lives of these boys, I suggest that the boys I interviewed represented a (predominantly) lower middle-class and upper working-class perspective, and therefore recognise that a replication of the same research conducted among boys from other socio-economic backgrounds, geographical areas, and more racially-diverse settings might offer varying data. Finally, research exploring the experiences of boys and young men in other male-dominated (elite, organised, and professional) sports academy settings would add to the sociological understanding of how competition, masculinities and friendships intersect in male lives. Further theoretical and analytical frameworks in social research that incorporate an engagement with the idea of elite, organised, commercial sport as neoliberalism-in-action, as well as a utilisation of Goffman's (1961) work on asylums and total institutions, may also be a fruitful avenue of exploration. In future studies, the variations of focus outlined above would certainly add to the current picture of youth, masculinities, friendships and competitive sport.

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